MUHAMMAD AND QURAN

Blood and Lies at the Root of Islam

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The Hunting

Because Muhammad's favorite wife lost a necklace, Muslim women can rarely prove rape. Because Muhammad grew up poor, Muslims conquered a larger empire than Alexander the Great. Because the Prophet needed an excuse for a dalliance, Palestinians launched the second intifada.

Muhammad haunts us, in ways that often defy comprehension. His Quran is the world's most poorly understood book. Its commands seem universal and urgent, and one in five people on earth treats it as a guide to life. Yet the Prophet's spur-of-the-moment needs led to key precepts, and they only make sense in the context of his career. This book shows how it is less a guide to life than a record of gambits in Muhammad's stunning rise.

For instance, no holy book rouses the bloodlust quite like the Quran.

Jesus never said, "The sword is the key of heaven and hell." Confucius never said, "I will instill terror into the hearts of the unbelievers." Buddha never told his followers to behead the non-Muslims in war and slice off their fingertips. None of them ever asked their followers to collect booty and share it with Allah (God). Muhammad made all these statements and more.

In fact, no founder of a major world religion has ever resembled Muhammad. No other prophet grew rich stealing others' property. No one else kept a harem. No one else assassinated poets. No one else was a child molester or mass murderer.

These facts tend to surprise Westerners, yet they are beyond debate and scholars and historians know them well. However, they have typically soft-focused them. For instance, regarding Muhammad's massacre of 600-700 Jews, Karen Armstrong says, "In the early seventh century, an Arab chief would not be expected to show any mercy to traitors like [them]." But Muhammad was not just an Arab chief and it's disingenuous to judge him by that standard. He claimed to be the voice of Allah and he preached a moral code, yet the slaughters he had carried out with Allah's blessing have entered the Quran and Islam for his followers to emulate.

Why do so many scholars, historians and authors condone crimes by Muhammad that they would condemn in anyone else's case? We believe it stems from a wish not to seem intolerant, and certainly religious bigotry has bedeviled humanity. But it's no virtue to whitewash brutality.

The author was a Muslim himself. He knows most Muslims are as kind and loving as anyone else— his own family members are Muslims — and he does not have to prove it. As an insider, he believes he can treat Muhammad and the Quran honestly.

And they badly need such a treatment. Muslim extremists have seized the world spotlight by destroying the World Trade Center, threatening death to novelists and cartoonists, and, in Iran, seeking to build a nuclear bomb. Westerners advance numerous explanations for such violence, many are partly true. But they too rarely cite the Quran itself, the source fundamentalists rely on for their anti-human activities.

Westerners misunderstand the Quran because they hear such contradictory evidence about it. One day former President George W. Bush would call Islam a religion of peace

and the next a jihadist would shout an inflammatory verse from the Quran as he died. Non-Muslims naturally wonder.

However, most Muslims don't understand the Quran either. Many are illiterate. And those Muslim children who do attend Islamic seminaries and regular schools must read the book in Arabic, which only about 18 percent of Muslims know. The author grew up in Bangladesh, and along with his young friends he had to read the Quran in this foreign tongue. It might as well have been in Braille.

The nature of the Quran itself worsens the problem. It arose piecemeal, as a collection of Allah's revelations to Muhammad. [R.V.C. Bodley, a respected author of the Prophet's biography, believes Allah is absent from it. Instead, he says Muhammad wrote it and it "defies analysis." He adds, "It cannot be characterized by any one epithet, for there is no one sura which sustains a uniform character throughout. Much of it is unoriginal, with thoughts borrowed from the Old and New Testament." He further says, "It [the Quran] reflects Mohammed. In fact, it is Mohammed." *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammed*, pp. 226, 239, and 232] Muhammad didn't even assemble it. His followers put it together after his death from scraps others jotted down during his lifetime, and there is no evidence he wanted posterity to see his ploys. In fact, when he had Allah said, "For each period is a Book (revealed)," [Quran, 13:38] he implied it was meant for his time. [Cf. Quran, 42:7] Clearly, the Quran is not a book for our time, nor was it intended to impart lessons on good morality, good living and the value of human life to its followers. Had Muhammad compiled it himself, thinking of universality and the world opinion, he might have omitted those passages that plague the Quran today.

Since the Quran replicates Muhammad addressing the faithful, [Cf. Quran; 43:24] it speaks directly to the reader. It thus has a powerful sense of command to Muslims, largely devoid of environment, time and space.

The Quran is also non-chronological, a fact that further obscures its historical meaning. Compilers simply arranged its chapters by length, from longest to the shortest, as if any structure would suffice. So while the sayings of Jesus Christ appear in well-sketched stories, in context, those of Muhammad emerge from air. The book thus gains a further sense of universality.

The Quran hardly deserves it. In fact, many of its pivotal revelations from Allah arose directly to solve Muhammad's personal crises. [The Quran, 66:1 et al] Their convenience is breathtaking and, rather than universal, they are as limited as an alibi.

For instance, when others charged Muhammad's favorite wife with sexual indiscretion, Allah spoke to him. The verdict? Muhammad was not a cuckold, Allah said, adding that Muslims needed four male witnesses to prove such an offense. This expedient became hardened in the Islamic law. It has not only made rape almost unprovable in lands with Sharia — how many rapes have four witnesses? — but subjected countless victims to lashing, imprisonment and stoning to death for alleged adultery.

The Quran really expounds two different philosophies, again because of its history. The verses delivered in Mecca, when Muhammad lacked power, are gentler and more conciliatory. This is Armstrong's Quran. Those delivered in Medina, when he was raiding caravans and confiscating the wealth of Jews, are militaristic and even savage. This is the

jihadists' Quran. As a result, the Quran describes both a creed of peace and ne of war. The theological cherry-picker has a choice.

Despite the inconsistencies, Muslims consider the Quran a constitution handed down to them from heaven. Its contents, they believe, were valid in the past and will remain so until the world ends. Therefore, Muslim theologians maintain that every Muslim man, woman, and child must read the Quran and follow it to his or her fullest capacity. It "has to be read," one asserts, "not only with the tongue and voice and eyes, but with the best light that our intellect can supply, and even more, with the truest and purest light which our heart and conscience can give us." [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *Holy Quran*, vol. 1, p. 3]

It is an excellent advice, yet most Muslims do just the opposite. They read the Quran with their eyes open, but their minds and hearts closed. They hardly realize what guidance, if any, the heavenly constitution provides to help them lead their lives in our modern time. Muhammad's environment directly shaped the Quran; today's environment rarely shapes its interpretation. Overall, Muslims fail to consider whether or not all the Quranic stipulations, in their present form, can be acceptable today to a rational mind. The upshot is an array of problems. Many of the schisms and antagonisms among Muslims arise from varying interpretations of the Quran by innumerable Muslim theologians, belonging to myriad schools of thought, belief, and practice. All too often, the Quran and its explicators so mold Muslims that they fail to distinguish worldly matters from spiritual aspirations, making it

difficult for unbiased people to communicate reasonably with them.

Muslim theologians use the Quran's teachings to gain ardent followers for them. Yet they interpret identical verses very differently, without considering the impact of their conflicting opinions on the minds of the faithful. Hence, theological controversies and polemical arguments, inter- and intra-sectarian feuds, have long been an integral part of the Islamic world.

Nonetheless, dissent by common followers remains taboo. To squelch it, religious authorities threaten dissenters with the torments of Hell. Because the Quranic dictates and theological interpretations are sacrosanct in Islam, Muslims follow them absolutely, often unsettling the normal flow not only of their own lives, but of others' as well. Hence, Quranic exhortations and their interpretations can prove fatal to most Muslims. Some become zealots who, in their religious fervor, often transgress the norms of human behavior. They may even slaughter their fellow-religionists over mere disagreements on their own Islamic concepts.

The Quran is written in Arabic, one of the world's most mellifluous, exhilarating, and expressive languages. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic. The triumph of Islam was, and remains, to a certain extent the triumph of this language. [Phillip K. Hitti in *History of the Arabs*; pp. 90 &91]

All Muslims, regardless of their native tongue, must use Arabic in prayers and the numerous Islamic rites. The power of this beautiful language, mesmerizing even to the rational minds of casual listeners, influences devout Muslims further when they recite it in rhythmic harmony. In religious ecstasy,

these Muslims become oblivious of their own existence and actions, and thus Islam can harm even those who don't participate in the Muslims' fanatical deeds.

At the same time, the saner and less religious Muslims — who abhor the violent acts of their Islamic-minded brethren, purportedly to advance Islam — feel appalled when non-Muslim communities label them leftists, terrorists, rebels, insurgents, or fanatics. Some Muslims have helped foster perceptions against all, and as a result, peace-loving persons with the so-called Arabian names can become objects of ridicule and distrust to people unaccustomed to violence on the scale now afflicting the world.

The causes that spur Muslims to violence deserve a serious examination. Conventional wisdom holds that economic deprivation and lack of political freedom turn Muslims to terrorism. Though these causes might seem fully explanatory, in fact they are only two facets of a complex phenomenon intrinsically associated with the Muslim mentality, which is shaped by the Quran.

The time is long overdue for a detailed, objective study of the Quran and the teachings of Islam. Thus, we here examine the roots of Islam, its origin as a very specific tool in time and place, and its usefulness for Muhammad in the many crises he faced throughout his life. We present in the following pages our analysis of some of the beliefs and practices that Muslims the world over hold dear to their hearts.

For instance, why are most Muslims poor? The world's first cities arose in southern Iraq, now Muslim, and presumably the world's first markets also arose in the Muslim-dominated lands. At times in history, Muslims have developed well-deserved reputations as traders. Yet today, even though some

Muslim countries abound in oil, the most traded natural commodity on earth, their people usually remain poor. Few Islamic countries have developed effective, competitive market economies for themselves.

The reasons for the Muslim poverty are complex, but the Quran has played a key role in its creation. For instance, Muslims treasure those Quranic exhortations, which require them to remain content with whatever Allah gave them in this world. They consider inviolable its commands not to strive for anything beyond their bare needs. They highly value Quranic teachings, which regard the world and all its contents as ephemeral. They believe that eternal life with the promised bliss in a world hereafter will compensate for all their sacrifices during their earthly sojourn. They obey the Quran when it asks them to shun this world and all the materialistic achievements, and to devote their time and energy to the service of Allah. [Cf. Q 25:64. Allah wants the Muslims to spend their nights "in adoration of their Lord."] It has not clearly asked them to work hard to improve their lot. This outlook is precisely the opposite of the Protestant Ethic, which sociologist Max Weber famously said has helped spur the prosperity of the West. Clearly, if Muslims want independence from their political and economic enslavement, they must loosen their bonds with the pre-capitalist Quran. They must rise up and adapt to the modern market economies before time runs out and they remain stranded where they find themselves today.

Illiteracy is another problem in the Muslim lands. In every developed economy, most people can read and write. But while some Muslims are literate, the vast majority of them are not. Their ignorance is a boon to the powerful and others who

derive sustenance from their victims. For instance, politicians find it easy to exploit the illiterate masses for their personal gains. Similarly, religious leaders find the uneducated convenient targets, and extract their livelihoods from them by invoking their victims' religious sentiments. And hostility toward other creeds remains prominent in Islam. Although a fraction of Muslims adopt a logical and moderate attitude toward their religion, most are irrationally arrogant about what they claim to be its superior teachings. In their blindness, they even defend those inflammatory statements of the Quran that teach hatred toward Jews, Christians, and those who "believe not in Allah, Last Day nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle." [Q 9:29] To many Muslims, the Prophet's recollected sayings are as important as the contents of the Quran. One reads:

Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger (peace be on Him) as saying: "The last Hour would not come till the Muslims fight against the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them until the Jews hide themselves behind the stones and trees, and the stones and trees would speak up saying: 'O Muslims! O slave of Allah. There is a Jew hiding behind me; come and kill him.' The Gharqad tree would speak, for it is the tree of the Jews."

This saying would have found favor with Hitler.

We will explore these issues more deeply later, clarifying the connection between Muhammad and the Muslims' pocketbooks, reading ability, and tolerance. We will also address Muhammad's pervasive influence in other important areas, such as the subjugation of women and the toleration of slavery and prostitution.

Interpreting the Quran

First, however, we must provide background on the Quran itself. To understand its full impact on the Muslim minds, one must read it very carefully. One must also know the conditions under which Allah purportedly conveyed His messages to Muhammad, since that context narrows their meaning and often shows that their *raison d'etre* was to solve problems in Muhammad's hectic life. One must also understand its history, and its compilation 23 years after his death. One must examine a plethora of traditions, also known as *Hadith*, without which many Quranic stipulations are opaque. Finally, one must also refer to various exegeses known as *Tafsir* to understand its contents.

How much do we know about Muhammad himself? The answer is: A lot. In 1851, French academic Ernest Renan wrote that he lived "in the full light of history," and indeed whereas the historical Buddha and Confucius flicker in shadow and Jesus appears in brief sketches, Muhammad is visible in detail. [Phillip K. Hitti holds a similar view; see his "*History of the Arabs*", p. 111] He also enjoyed an earthly career as a ruler and general, and contemporaries paid far more attention to him than, say, to Jesus Christ. Hence we have copious material, and the biography of Muhammad, called the *Sira*, and his Sunnah (practices) along with the Quran and his sayings. His practices and sayings are collectively known as the Hadith.

However, this material has suffered sifting, through lapse of time and human expurgation. The first biography of

Muhammad appeared 150 years after his death — as if the first biography of Lincoln appeared today— written by Muhammad **Ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar** (704-773). The original has more or less vanished, and today we possess a version edited by a man who died 60 years after Ibn Ishaq and who eliminated *"things which it is disgraceful to discuss; matters which would distress certain people."* One wonders what matters "disgraceful to discuss" an editor might cut from the life of Buddha, say. But there were no doubt plenty with Muhammad, judging from the embarrassing material that remains. In any case, the version that has reached us exhibits both fawning reverence and apparent concern for truth, as shown by numerous qualifiers. It also contains tales almost impossible to believe and hence modern biographies by scholars such as Martin Lings and Maxime Rodinson have become indispensable.

How did the Quran arise? According to Islamic traditions, it is a document of fabulous purity. Indeed, based on a Quranic statement, Muslims believe that Allah wrote the contents of their holy book on a Tablet [Q 13:39] and preserved it in *Lauh-e-Mahfooz*, a sacred place in the seventh sky [Q 85:22] so that He can keep His eyes on it. He revealed a portion of the holy book to Moses and Jesus Christ and then wanted their followers to *"settle their dispute"* [Q 3:23] according to what is written in the entire celestial book! The Tablet was eventually brought down in the time of Muhammad to the sky that is nearest to the earth. The exact location where the celestial Quran remains even today is called *Baitul Izzat* and it lies just above the Ka'aba in Mecca. Here, angels congregate, reciting from the Quran and praying to Allah on a regular basis. Because angels are believed to be free from all sins, why they pray to Allah regularly is a difficult question to answer.

Curiously, the Quranic verse from which Muslims draw the above inference does not describe where in the sky Allah might have preserved the Tablet. Curiously, too, in a modern world unanticipated by the Prophet, where planes have traversed almost every part of the earth's atmosphere and satellites repeatedly photograph every square inch of ground, no one has ever found it. Thus, we must regard *Baitul Izzat* (or *Baitul Mamoor*, as it is also called) as a figment of the ardent Muslim theologians who, seeking to ensure Islam's survival and prosperity, concocted ludicrous visions, even ones that defy their own common sense.

Historians, however, tell us a different story. According to them, the Quran is a collection of revelations that Muhammad issued to his followers throughout his life. One of his scribes, Zayd ibn Thabit, wrote them down, possibly improving them, and he used whatever material lay at hand such as stone, bone, and even leaves. Another scribe was Abdullah b. Sa'd, who *"used to write down the revelations; then he apostatized and returned to Quraysh, and fled to Uthman b. Affan whose foster-brother he was."* [Ibn Ishaq, "*Sirat Rasulallah*", translated by A. Guillaume, p. 550] The reasons for his apostasy and fleeing are not clear to us.

Leaves, of course, are highly fragile, so some content must have gotten lost. Bone is also biodegradable, and stone can get scuffed. The Prophet apparently never collected these scraps. That is why none of them can be found today. But after his death, the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, set about gathering them and assembling them into a book. Why? We'll explain why more fully later, but let us say here that Islam was a critical foundation of his rule. Yet Muhammad's career had inspired a throng of imitators in Arabia, such as al-Aswad in the Yemen,

and by assuring Muhammad's primacy, the Caliph wanted to secure his government. In addition, Muhammad's teachings were a source of law for Muslims, and their compact presentation helped people understand the Prophet's utterances. The effort culminated with the first Quran in 656, in the final year of the third Caliph, Othman.

Thus, 23 years and three Caliphs passed between Muhammad's death and the advent of the first Quran. The implications are unavoidable. We have no idea which of the Prophet's scattered revelations the compilers found or missed — and those from earlier Meccan period are notably shorter. We have no idea, if strong-willed rulers — especially Omar, the second Caliph — might themselves have dictated what in the Suras and phrases appeared and what didn't. Certainly individuals who have mastered the exercise of power typically use it freely, in every sphere available. We have no idea if forgeries entered the Quran, and though it does tend to speak with a consistent authorial voice, good writers can imitate style. Overall, we don't really know how complete or accurate the Quran is— a concern that led some scholars to conclude that the "text [of the Quran] was finally fixed by the two vizirs ibn-Muqlah and ibn-Isa in 933 with the help of the learned ibn-Mujahid. Ibn-Mujahid admitted seven readings, which had developed because of lack of vowel and diacritical marks, as canonical." [Phillip K. Hitti, op. cit. p. 123, quoting Arthur Jeffery's "*Materials for the History of the Text of the Koran*", pp. 1-10, and Hartwig Hirschfeld's "*New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Koran*", pp.138 *et seq*.]

The concern about accuracy becomes especially acute in light of later interpretations of the Quran. Tradition says that the need to explicate Quranic statements arose during the

lifetime of Muhammad himself. People often asked him questions about the meaning of certain words, such as *al-Furqan*, [The title of Sura 25. According to N. J. Dawood, "*this word has puzzled Muslim commentators. It is probably identical with the Aramaic 'porqan' (salvation)*". See the Koran, p. 252] or about the bearing of statements on particular problems, or about details of certain historical or spiritual matters. Muhammad's Companions, called *As-hab*, carefully stored his answers in their memories, together with the revelations from Allah. Though they were normal human beings, we are told, they could remember his countless sayings instantly and infallibly for years, after hearing them once or twice from the Prophet's mouth.

Over 230 years after the death of Muhammad, people like Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, Muslim ibn al-Hijjaj al-Quraishi, and others collected his practices and sayings and explanations from various sources and called them Hadith. The process was an invitation to fraud — much as if individuals could alter the U.S. Constitution by inventing memories of the words of Madison or Jefferson. Because so many Hadiths are inauthentic, commentators today often add the word *Sahih* or "sound" before each Hadith they quote in their commentaries ("sound" in the sense of solid, trustworthy). It is a ploy to make them seem believable to individuals who seek the truth behind Quranic statements, whose incredible nature the Hadiths often try to rationalize. As most Hadiths are spurious, learned but liberal Muslim theologians refuse to recognize them and instead urge their followers to rely only on the Quran. Therefore, the number of the "Quran only" Muslims is on the rise.

However, most obsessive theologians, preachers, and common Muslims are not so careful. They use inauthentic Hadiths to interpret the Quran according to their fancy, typically in a way that advances their personal interests. To them, consistency is unimportant. They will support even a fantastic Hadith when it suits their purpose, and belittle it when it goes against their interest! To compound an already complicated situation, Muslims developed the "science" of Tafsir or Exegesis, supposedly "to examine the correct hadith originating from various authorities and to investigate the philological significance of the Quranic words." [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, '*The Holy Quran'*, vol. 1, p. ix] In the process, vast learning was supposedly collected about the root meanings, their usages by the Quraish tribe of Mecca (to which Muhammad belonged), and the meaning of words in the purest original Arabic, before foreign usages corrupted them. But despite an enormous expense of talent, labor, and money, the Tafsir is still in disarray and the Muslim doctors remain divided on fundamental issues as well as on sophistries that they invent in defense of doctrines that are supposedly divine. Hence, interpretation of the Quranic verses varies widely, and persons uninitiated in the Islamic methodologies fail to understand what coherent and practical messages Allah intended to convey to people in order to better their lives. (One wonders why Allah did not foresee this problem, and why He has not found another vehicle to clarify matters.) When the confused people express their dismay, Muslims label them enemies of Islam, worthy of hatred — even destruction, where possible— to safeguard Islam from their vile designs!

Although unanimity hardly exists among the Muslim interpreters, some go so far as to explain pre-historical matters

relating to Adam and Eve. They feel no embarrassment in using their own imagination to explain such matters as the celestial mysteries to their ignorant audiences. To impress the credulous, they even invent grossly disgusting stories. They imbue these tales with such a deep religious hue that ignorant Muslims, always in extreme fear of flames in the next life, gladly accept them as divine and true. The explanations that follow these inventions are often dumbfounding — close to insanity— and can be repugnant to human taste and decency.

In fact, the interpreters' efforts to explain the Quran run counter to the declaration of the Quran itself for, according to Allah, it is a complete, straight, and perspicuous Book. [The Quran, 18:2] Elsewhere in the book, Allah appears to retract this claim and adds that the Quran contains two kinds of verses or statements: Basic ones that form its foundation and the allegorical ones whose hidden meaning only Allah can understand and that "none will grasp its messages except men of understanding." [The Quran, 3:7] But He has given us no clear guidelines for recognizing these "men of understanding," whose grasp of the Quran must equal Allah's, so the Islamic savants have tacitly implied for years about the obscure passages, but without resolution.

Some Muslim interpreters concur with Allah and tell us that the Quran does, indeed, contain some mystical words, such as *Alif*, *Lam*, *Mim*, [Quran; 2:1 and et al] whose real meanings we humans can never comprehend. They also say that even Muhammad, the direct recipient of those words, had not grasped them, much less his disciples, who had the duty of following him without asking embarrassing questions. After the example of Muhammad's disciples, Muslim theologians and interpreters ask their compliant fellow believers not to try

to decipher the supposedly mystic words of the Quran, thus sparing themselves the punishments that they must otherwise face on the Day of Resurrection!

Nevertheless, our search into the origin of the so-called mysterious words reveals a different story. We are told that before the birth of Muhammad, the Quraish people of Mecca spoke a beautiful Arabic, even though they lacked formal education, since no institutions to teach them their language existed at the time. However, Arabs in the north of the Arabian Peninsula are believed to have the ability to read and write the language with great sophistication. Whether they had institutions to acquire the ability, or some of them acquired it through an exercise of their own, is not known. Well-versed in the tongue, they are, however, said to have composed lyrical and eloquent poems, which they recited in fairs held periodically in the neighborhoods of Mecca. People respected the best poets and women sought them as mates. Poetry was, and remains, an essential part of the Bedouin life.

Over time, poets began introducing meaningless words into their poems to make them more melodious and rhapsodical. They resembled the "hey, nonnie nonnie" of Shakespeare's lyrics and the nonsense syllables in certain popular songs today. Listeners knew that these terms had no actual referents, yet they did not object as long as the additions soothed the ear.[See Maulana Abul Ala Mududi's '*Tafhimul Quran*', vol.1, p. 49] Muhammad grew up hearing these compositions, and he, too, included such meaningless words in his speeches, aware that they would resonate with the listening sensibilities of his audience and help Allah establish a bond with His otherwise less-receptive subjects.

It is a misunderstanding that highlights, in miniature, the much larger problems with the Quran today. Nonetheless, this book remains the soul, heart, mind, and the body of Islam. It makes a Muslim a Muslim. No one can stay a Muslim without following all of its dictums. Therefore, everyone who wants to understand Islam and all that it stands for must know as much as possible about it.

We have briefly introduced the Quran. Let us now look into the life and deeds of Muhammad, the charismatic founder of the religion of Islam. It was he, who transformed the nomad people of his land into a formidable force, which not only spilled beyond the periphery of his own country in his lifetime, but thrives today in almost every nook of our present world.

Part I: The Outcast

Muhammad in Mecca

An Accidental Conception..?

A long time ago, a tiny spot in the sandy soil of Arabia became the focal point of the Pagan nomads of the desert. Known to them as Bakka, it had a well they called Zamzam, which supplied them with water throughout the year. Water was one of the rarest commodities in their lives and to find it so easily seemed a miracle. Believing that Allah had wrought the miracle, they built a House to Him nearby so that they could thank and worship Him for His favor. They named it Kaba, or the House of Allah.

Over time, the name of this little town evolved into Mecca and it acquired great importance for two reasons. *First*, it was the center of idol worship, and many nomadic tribes from all across the Peninsula regularly made pilgrimages to it, greatly enhancing the prestige and well-being of the Quraish, the city's dominant tribe. *Second*, it had become an active center for commerce, and caravans - seasonal and occasional - halted here for relaxation and replenishment of their water supply and then departed to distant lands on their trading missions.

Yet Mecca was still a tiny township with less than a few thousand people. It lay in an arid, inhospitable land unable to produce anything to support its inhabitants. Its pathways were dusty and it had no civic facility worth the name. Its denizens knew little about personal health or hygiene.

Dwelling in tiny roofless homes built of clay, most lived in great poverty, and many had to wear the skins of goats and sheep. No schools of any kind existed here.

In contrast, Jews of Medina seem to have run their own schools, instructing their children primarily in religious matters. They were more enlightened and prosperous than the Meccan Pagans.

Because both the sedentary and Bedouin Arabs could hardly light a fire, either for cooking or illumination, they regularly ate dates, locusts, and lizards raw, and used camel's milk as a substitute for water. However, the Quran says that Allah had provided them with a "green tree" from which they obtained fire to meet their needs. [Q36:80] At night, the Arabs stayed inside their tents and homes, fearing mischief from capricious Jinns, which they believed attacked humans in the darkness of solitary places.

The economic condition of the Bedouin Arabs was worse than their Meccan cousins. They normally lived in a condition of semi-starvation and to them the fighting mood was a chronic state of mind. Vendetta was one of the strongest religio-social institutions in their lives. [Phillip K. Hitti, op. cit. p. 89] Having little worthwhile to do either during day or night, most Arabs spent their time gossiping, drinking, gambling, or narrating the fables of the past. [Cf. Q 23:67] Their other main preoccupation was sex, both hetero- and homosexual, for they reputedly possessed a strong carnal passion.

The Arabs practiced pederasty, which they considered normal. Their womenfolk also seem to have led licentious lives, engaging in sex with any men they felt attracted to. Men apparently felt this behavior was normal for their women. It is

said that in the evening when Abdullah, Muhammad's father, would walk to the cabin of his wife, Amina, to sleep with her, the belles of the town would line up on the street and openly express their desire to sleep with him.

The city's Quraish tribe consisted of three groups. One was the priestly class, which controlled the Kaba and lived on income it generated from pilgrims. The second group consisted of a small number of traders. The third was large, and comprised of people, who earned their livelihoods by supplying water and other services to pilgrims as well as to caravanners who halted in the city before taking off for their destinations. Such occupations did not, however, guarantee them a regular income; when the visitors to the city were plentiful, they thrived, but when their number declined, so did their revenue. Those people resembled the modern laborers, who get paid only when employed for performing a specific service.

Muhammad's father Abdullah belonged to the third tier of the Quraish. Because he lacked a good, reliable income, his household repeatedly suffered deprivation. Often, he and Amina had to go to bed without food. Recurring poverty had its impact; the couple fought frequently, arguing about their financial condition and future prospects.

Recognizing that she and her husband lacked the means to feed another mouth, Amina did not want to have children. Her husband helped her avoid pregnancies, using the method the Arabs called *ajal*, or "coitus interruptus." But this approach is hardly foolproof, and based on her subsequent behavior toward Muhammad, we believe that it failed once, with colossal consequences for history. Against her will, Amina found herself with a child.

Amina would have been upset. She may well have tried to end the pregnancy, without success. Thwarted, she resigned herself to her fate and decided to carry the child to term. Abdullah felt compassion for her discomfort and sought to help by providing her with the services of a slave-girl of Ethiopian origin, named Barakat.

But as misfortune would have it, Amina's husband died, when she was about six months into her pregnancy. This tragedy increased her hatred of the child in her womb. She considered it a jinx and worried that many more mishaps would befall her after she delivered the baby.

At his death, Abdullah is believed to have owned five camels, a few sheep, and a female slave. We do not know how Amina supported herself after her husband's untimely death.

In time Amina gave birth to a baby boy. She called him Kathan, but his grandfather renamed him Muhammad. [R.V.C. Bodley, *The Messenger*, p. 5] Kathan was the name of a race that is believed to have originated from the elder line of the Arabs who, in the Arab tradition, were said to be descended not from Abraham but from Kathan, the biblical Joktan [Gen. 10:25], who descended from Noah. The Kathan are regarded as the indigenous Arabs (*Arab al-ariba*), or the original Arabs (*mutariba*).

Contrary to the general belief of the modern Muslims, Muhammad is not a Muslim name. Rather, it is an Arabian name which the Pagans gave to their male children before Muslims existed. [Cf. Ibn Ishaq, '*Sirat Rasul Allah*', p. 23. He mentions a man by the name of Muhammad, who sought bounty from Abraha, when he invaded Mecca before the birth of the Prophet of Islam]

We do not know the actual date of Muhammad's birth and scholarly opinion varies. Philip K. Hitti says that he was born in or around 571 A.D. [Phillip K. Hitti, *op. cit.* p. 111] Abdullah Yusuf Ali maintains, "The year usually given for the Prophet's birth is 570 A.D, though the date must be taken as only approximate, being the middle figure between 569 and 571, the extreme possible limits." [*The Holy Quran*, vol. 2, p. 1071]

On the other hand, some Muslims insist that Muhammad was born in the early hours of Monday, August 29, 570 A.D. [Ghulam Mustafa, *Vishva Nabi*, p. 70] Each year they observe this occasion with great fanfare. Yet just as with Jesus Christ, the date and hour of Muhammad's birth are completely unknown to scholars and the students of Islam. Hence, the celebrations held now to honor his birth have no evidentiary basis and are mere traditions.

Muslims claim that Muhammad was a descendent of Ismail who, the Bible implies, was an illegitimate son of Abraham, born of Hagar, an Egyptian handmaid of his wife Sarah. [Genesis, 16:1-15] It was this son Ismail, most Muslims believe, whom Abraham attempted to sacrifice upon Allah's command in a dream, and who, as a consequence, earned the heavenly title of "*Zabi-Ullah*," that is, "the one to be sacrificed in the name of Allah" (rather than his legitimate son Isaac, as the Book of Genesis claims).

Was Muhammad truly the son of Abdullah? As noted above, the Arabs lived in a state of moral decadence at the time. Though marriage existed among them, they pursued extramarital sex at whim. On the subject of the Arabs' fornication, Maxime Rodinson quotes Rabbi Wathan: "*Nowhere in the world was there such a propensity towards fornication as among the Arabs, just as nowhere was there any power like that of*

Persia, or wealth like that of Rome, or magic like that of Egypt. If the entire sexual license in the world were divided into ten parts, nine of these would be distributed among the Arabs and the tenth would be enough for all the other races." [*Muhammad*, translated by Anne Carter, p. 54]

R.V.C. Bodley implicitly concurs, saying: "*There was Amr Ibn al as Aass, the son of a beautiful Meccan prostitute. All the better Meccans were her friends, so that anyone, from Abu Sufian down, might have been Amr's father. As far as anyone could be sure, he might have called himself Amr Ibn Abu Lahab, or Ibn al Abbas or Ibn anyone else among the Koreishite [Quraishite] upper ten. According to Meccan standards of that time, it did not matter who had sired him*." [*Op. cit*. p. 73]

Muhammad was born during this period and, if Bodley is correct, Meccan society did not care who had fathered him. All children, including Muhammad, born in these circumstances could reasonably face questions about their fathers' true identities.

Mohammed Taha Mohammed Ahmed, editor of *Al-Wifaq* newspaper in the Sudan, openly questioned Muhammad's paternity. According to him, Abdullah was not the Prophet's father. Ahmed faced a death sentence for his claim. [See the paper's issue of May 6, 2005]

Despite becoming the mother of a son, whom her society greatly valued, Amina continued to despise the newborn boy, as she remained "very unhappy" at the death of her husband, and, consequently, was "not much good to him." [R.V.C. Bodley, op. cit. p. 27] For instance, she refused to suckle him, even when she knew he was very hungry. Seeing the child's suffering and wishing to help him survive, **Thuwaibah**, a slave-girl of the child's uncle Abu Lahab, assumed

responsibility for breastfeeding him until someone else might take him into her permanent care.

The Spring and the Rock

The Pagans were a deeply religious people. They were also polytheistic. They thought that a god existed to look after every aspect of their lives. Above all, they believed that there was a god who gave them life. The same god, whom they called Allah, *[Phillip K. Hitti, op. cit. p.100]* created the earth and the heavens, subjected the sun and the moon to his law, gave all creatures their sustenance, protected them from the hazards of the earth, and rained water from the sky. *[Q 29:61-63]* To the Pagans, this Allah was true and just, and He was the Most High and Most Great. *[Cf. Q 34:23. This verse should be read with the preceding verse]* but they also believed there were other gods who, apart from carrying out their varied duties, made them successful in their battles.

The Pagans worshipped lesser gods partly because, they believed, they had the power to intercede with Allah on their behalf. Notable among such gods were *al-Lat*, *al-Manat* and *al-Uzza*. The Pagans believed they were the daughters of Allah3 and, and as such, they had special sway with Him. However, *al-Uzza* (the most high, Venus, the morning star) was the most venerated idol among the Quraish.

The Pagans believed in, and worshipped 360 gods, all represented by idols. They kept these idols inside and outside the Kaba, a cubic structure built by the founding fathers of Paganism to protect their idols from the hostile and unpredictable climate of Mecca. The Pagans worshipped these statues not because they believed the idols were gods, but because they felt they could thereby draw themselves nearer

to the living gods, whom the idols represented.[1 The Quran, 46:28]

The entire population of the Arabian Peninsula also believed in the invisible angels, who visited those destined to receive special favors from Allah. Because the Arabs thought the angels were close to Allah, many also worshipped these beings with the hope that, if pleased, the angels would petition Allah to relieve them from their endless sufferings.

We do not know for sure when the Pagans began living on the Arabian soil, and since culture is always changing, such origins can be hard to pinpoint. But archaeological investigations in the 20th century brought certain facts to light. They revealed that around 3500 BC, Semitic-speaking peoples of Arabian origin migrated into Mesopotamia, supplanted the Sumerians, and became the Babylonians and Assyrians. Some archeologists argue that another group of Semites left Arabia about 2500 BC, settled in the Levant, and mixed with the local populations, and that some of these migrants became the later Amorites and Canaanites. Other scholars contend that the immigrants, instead, came from the northern Levant, and still others say that no migration at all took place, and that the outside influences in the Levantine population came from traders.

What caused such migrations? Bernard Lewis writes in *The Arabs in History*:

"*Arabia was originally a land of great fertility and the first home of the Semitic peoples. Through the millennia it has been undergoing a process of steady desiccation, a drying up of wealth and waterways and a spread of the desert at the expense of the cultivable land. The declining productivity of the peninsula, together with the increase in the number of the inhabitants, led to a series of crises of over-*

population and consequently to a recurring cycle of invasions of the neighboring countries by the Semitic peoples of the peninsula. It was these crises that carried the Assyrians, Aramaeans, Canaanites (including the Phoenicians and Hebrews), and finally the Arabs themselves into the Fertile Crescent."

It is thus clear that the Pagans had long inhabited the Arabian Peninsula. For instance, there is a lost city in The Empty Quarter known as Iram of the Pillars. It is estimated that it lasted from about 3000 BC to the first century AD.

The better-watered, higher portions of the extreme southwest portion of the Arabian Peninsula supported three early kingdoms.

The first, the Minaean, was centered in the interior of modern-day Yemen, but probably controlled most of southern Arabia. Although dating is difficult, scholars generally believe that it existed from 1200 to 650 BC.

The second kingdom, the Sabaean, arose around 930 BC and lasted until about 115 BC. Eventually, it probably supplanted the Minaean Kingdom and occupied substantially the same territory. The Sabaean capital, Marib, likely flourished more than any other city in ancient Arabia, partly because of its position astride the caravan routes linking the Mediterranean seaports with the frankincense-growing region of the Hadhramaut and partly because a large nearby dam provided water for irrigation. The Sabaean Kingdom was widely referred to as Saba, and some have suggested that the Queen of "Sheba," who visited King Solomon in Jerusalem in the 10th century BC, was a Sabaean.

The Himyarites followed the Sabaeans in southern Arabia, and their kingdom lasted from about 115 BC to about AD 525. In 24 BC the Roman Emperor Augustus sent the prefect of

Egypt, Aelius Gallus, against the Himyarites, but his army of 10,000 was unsuccessful and returned to Egypt. The Himyarites prospered in the frankincense, myrrh, and spice trade until the Romans began to open the sea routes through the Red Sea in order to facilitate their own trade.

We have outlined this history of the Arabian Peninsula to make one point: The Pagans had dwelt here for thousands of years and Allah never sent them a single prophet or apostle [Q 34:44] to lead them to His righteous path. As a result, the Pagan beliefs and rituals became deeply ingrained in them. Consequently, the Pagans refused to believe in Muhammad's declaration about an alien and brutal Allah as opposed to the Allah they worshipped and who they believed was kind, compassionate, forgiving and generous to all of His creations.

Was Muhammad Switched?

From time to time in this era, poor Bedouins from the desert flocked to Mecca to collect alms from those few who could afford to give them (as people do even today in the Muslim communities of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). Following the tradition, Halima, a poor Saadite shepherd woman, knocked at Amina's door one day. Being herself an impoverished widow, Amina had nothing to offer her. Instead, she unloaded her burden by handing her newborn son into Halima's custody.

The assertion that Amina merely gave Muhammad over to Halima's care, in keeping with the tradition of the Bedouin wet nurses breastfeeding the noblemen of Mecca, does not rest on fact. We have no record telling us that any Bedouin women had wet-nursed Muhammad's father, grandfather, or any of his uncles — all noblemen of the Quraish.

Muslim historians invented a "tradition" that never existed in the Arabian Peninsula to hide a truth of gigantic proportions from Muslims and the rest of the world. We will discuss it shortly. Halima was dumbfounded, for in her judgment, no sensible and loving mother would ever dispose off her baby in this way. Knowing well her own situation, she at first hesitated to accept the custody of the child. But when she considered that she would have, in due course, two more hands to help her family out in its dire circumstances, she took the baby and left for home.

Halima's tribe lived in one of the pastoral valleys of Northern Arabia. Though poor, they had a bold, industrious character. They subsisted on camel's milk, rice, dates, and occasionally a piece of mutton or gazelle. After a locust storm, they ate locusts fried in fat. They respected the sun and gave thanks for the rain, to meet the sandstorm and fiery simoom with their faces covered. They implanted primitive lore in the minds of their children as well as the code of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth – some of the lessons Muhammad later incorporated in the Quran. Unlike the Quraish, the people of the Saadite tribe excelled in the use of sword and lances. Their dexterity with the tools of war often earned them triumphs in their struggle to survive in the harsh desert.

Halima's son Abdullah was almost of Muhammad's age. She began rearing them to the best of her ability. She suckled both and cared for them equally. She looked forward to the day when those two would grow up and provide her with the help she yearned for to ease her life.

During her rare interludes for reflection, Halima, a loving and caring mother, often mulled over the future of her own son. She herself had been living the life of a Bedouin. Her long

experience convinced her that no matter how industrious and brave her son turned out to be, the barren desert could never afford him a life remotely comparable with that of the Meccans. She therefore wanted her son to go to Mecca to pursue a more comfortable existence there. But how could she send him to Mecca?

Halima thought and thought. Lost in this question, she often spent nights without sleep. Even during the day, the great challenge — how to induct Abdullah into the life of Mecca— occupied her mind. Her thorough exploration of possibilities eventually rewarded her. She realized that she could achieve her ambition easily if — with the Saadite boldness — she switched Abdullah with Muhammad, and sent Abdullah to Mecca to grow up in Amina's house. It was purely a selfish instinct of a caring, biological mother. The plan was simple and safe; for she was confident none from Mecca would ever question her son Abdullah's identity.

We can see exactly how Halima would have carried it out. First, she began calling Muhammad "Abdullah" and Abdullah "Muhammad." The infants were confused for a little while, but they soon got used to the change in their names.

Step two required Halima to develop a strategy that would not only fit in with the Pagans' age-old beliefs, but would also soften Amina's attitude towards her despised son, and take him into her arms. So she set about finding that strategy, which would convince Amina that her son was not a jinx, but actually a prodigy. But such a strategy required groundwork, so she gave it much thought and succeeded in developing it to her fullest satisfaction.

As soon as Muhammad entered his fifth year, Halima began telling everyone about his extraordinary gifts. She took

special pleasure in narrating the child's encounter with two angels whom, she claimed, her son Abdullah had seen with his own eyes, around Muhammad in a broad daylight.

Pressed for details, she would tell her listeners that one day Abdullah and Muhammad were playing in the field. Suddenly, two angels appeared out of nowhere before Muhammad. They laid him on the ground and one of them, Gabriel, opened up the child's heart. He cleansed it of impurity, wringing from it those black and bitter drops of sin that all humans inherit from Adam and that lurk within even his best descendents, inciting them to evil. After thoroughly purifying the infant Muhammad, Gabriel filled his throbbing heart with faith, knowledge, and prophetic light and then replaced it in his bosom.

During this visitation, Halima would tell them, the angels also impressed the seal of prophecy between Muhammad's shoulders. To prove her claim, she would make Abdullah-turned-Muhammad bare his body so that those who doubted her sanity could see the mark with their own eyes. Interestingly, Muhammad never referred to his birthmark, probably because he could not see it, and nothing he said ever suggested that he thought it had anything to do with his prophetic calling.

Halima needed this cunning tactic to hide a serious problem: Abdullah had a prominent birthmark between his shoulders, and Muhammad, the child born to Amina, didn't. If she had not invented the story of the angels and "the seal of prophecy," her plan to plant her son in Amina's house would have remained unfulfilled.

The ground thus prepared, Halima carried Muhammad – her son - to Mecca and sought to deposit him on Amina's lap.

Seeing her reluctance, Halima explained all that had allegedly happened to the child and spoke of the seal of prophecy on his back. Her account of the child's supernatural qualities changed Amina's opinion of him. She relented and took him back.

Halima returned to her tent in the desert, with the satisfaction that she had placed her son in a Meccan home, where he would grow into a man and, like the Meccans, lead a life of relative ease and abundance. And this switch altered the destinies of two innocent infants, one who was going undeservedly to live the life of an anonymous Bedouin, and the other who would change the history of the earth!

Muhammad remained with Amina until his sixth year, occasionally pining for Halima. He played with the local children, joined in their merrymaking, watched pilgrims pray at the Kaba, and welcomed and said goodbye to caravans that halted at the city before departing for their trading destinations. All the town's activities fascinated him, for he found them quite different from those he'd grown up with in the desert. At the same time, he felt irremediably like an outsider, and that outsider sense would shape his outlook and remain with him for the rest of his life.

All the misconceptions that Amina had about the child after his birth slowly disappeared and she treated him as a loving and caring mother. She fed him to the best of her ability, clothed him, and saw to his well-being. She also took him around in the city and introduced him to her near and distant relatives.

A few months after his return to Mecca, Amina took Muhammad to Medina and introduced him to her maternal relatives there. On her journey home, she died and was buried

at **Abwa**, a village between Medina and Mecca. **Barakat,** the slave-girl, now acted as mother to the orphan and delivered him to his grandfather Abd al-Mutalib, in whose household he would spend three years of his life.

The Orphan's Ordeals

Abd al Mutallib was the guardian of Ka'aba temple and enjoyed a good income. But he had a large family and often found it difficult to meet all of their needs. As a result, tension generally prevailed among his family members, though they put up a smiling face outside their home.

Muhammad's arrival in Mutallib's family did not help the situation; rather, it added a further load. All the family members wanted him gone, but as he was under his grandfather's protection, none dared ask him to leave. Unable to get rid of him, they began to hate him. They missed no opportunity to harass him and often deprived him of food and other necessities. They may not have had inflicted bodily injuries on him, but they almost certainly harmed him psychologically.

Whenever he suffered in his grandfather's home, none of its female members consoled him afterwards. Their attitude made him recall his mother keenly. He longed to be with her, to be loved and hugged by her. Despite his moaning and cries, he lacked the comfort of Halima's bosom, for she had gone back to the desert, after abandoning him amid the strange people of Mecca. He slowly began to hate his mother.

About three years after Muhammad joined this new family, Abd al Mutallib found his end approaching. He called his son Abu Talib and bequeathed him his grandson. Once more, Muhammad changed his home in which, he lived a number of

years. His life was developing into a series of violent contrasts. [1 Cf. R.V.C. Bodley, op. cit. p. 30]

On the death of his father, Abu Talib became the guardian of Ka'aba, assuming the religious functions performed by all of his predecessors. His priestly office required that his sacerdotal household rigidly observe all the rites and ceremonies of the sacred House of Allah. The young Muhammad could thus observe them closely and record them in his retentive memory. He would later incorporate most of them, sans idol worship, into his own religion, Islam.

The Caravan Trader

Muhammad's move to his uncle's home brought him no relief from domestic suffering. Abu Talib was not rich, but he too had a large family. Beyond his duties at the Ka'aba, he had begun trading to supplement his income, yet he still could not provide for all the needs of his family. Scarcity was the rule rather than the exception in his household, and Muhammad's arrival proved an extra burden for Abu Talib and everyone else. Consequently, family members made him feel unwelcome and used words and gestures in his presence, which acted as salt in the wounds from his grandfather's house.

Abu Talib realized that his nephew was suffering and he wanted to help, but he was handicapped. Had he been able to meet his family's immediate needs, he could have justified Muhammad's presence in his house, but he wasn't and hence he could do little for him but play the role of a silent spectator. When he could live no more with his nephew's anguish, he found him a job as a shepherd.

Child Muhammad's job required him to take his employers' camels, sheep, and goats into the plains for

grazing. He thus had to spend most of each day alone in the grim desert outside Mecca, where he let the animals roam about in search of a blade of grass among the pile of stones. We can visualize how a young, intensely sensitive and intelligent boy of Muhammad's age must have spent his time.

We all know that misfortune and sufferings create bitterness in a person and make him conscious of his situation, especially when nothing else distracts him from his thoughts. Such a person grieves over his ills and tries to discover their causes. While doing so, he develops a strange internal feeling, which only a person who has undergone the experience can describe.

Since the above observation amply applied to young Muhammad, we may safely conjecture that in the midst of his frustrating loneliness, he must have asked himself why he had come into the world as a fatherless orphan, and why he had to work as a shepherd in desolation at such a young age, while other children of his age were living with their parents. He must also have asked himself why his mother had left him at the mercy of the people he did not know, and why they treated him so differently from their own children.

Even though he was now bringing his meager income into his uncle's family, its members still treated him as before. Their continued scorn hurt him deeply, and the pain deepened his hatred towards his mother. He knew that if he had been living with her, he never would have endured the degrading insults from his purported relatives at the homes of his grandfather and uncle. He must have repeatedly asked himself: Why am I here, among the people who have no love or respect for me? And he blamed his mother for all his mental and physical sufferings.

Dejected, young Muhammad stopped playing with other children in his spare time. Instead, he felt more comfortable talking with people who visited Mecca on pilgrimage or trade. He enjoyed their conversation on religious matters. He also derived immense pleasure from their story-telling. Very often, he prompted them to narrate the tantalizing and fascinating Arabian tales of the past. Most of these fables acted like balm for his wounds. When he got the opportunity, he retold them eloquently to his listeners. These tales later became an integral part of the Quran.

When he had no story-telling session to attend, he enjoyed watching the arrival and departure of the caravans, which thronged at the gate of Mecca before setting out for destinations like Syria and the Yemen. The very thought of visiting those faraway lands fired young Muhammad with excitement and charged his mind with visions he hoped to see himself one day.

One day, Muhammad saw Abu Talib mount his camel to depart with a caravan bound for Syria. Unable to suppress his ardent desire, he begged his uncle to take him along on his journey. Abu Talib could not deny his forceful request and let him accompany him. In those days, the route to Syria lay through regions rich in fables and traditions, which the traveling Arabs delighted to recount during the evening respites of their caravans. The vast solitude of the desert in which the wandering Arabs passed so much of their lives gave birth to numerous superstitious fancies. They peopled the deserts with good and evil Jinns, and clothed them with tales of enchantment, depicting wondrous but dubious events, which they believed had unfolded in the distant past.

While traveling, the youthful Muhammad doubtless imbibed many of these desert superstitions. Stored in his excellent memory, they later played a powerful role in his thoughts and imagination.

We may note here two of the many ancient Arabian legends, which Muhammad must have heard at this time and which he recounted afterwards in the Quran. One related to the mountainous district of Hijr. [Q 15:80] As caravans crossed the silent, empty valleys, travelers often gazed at caves at the sides of certain mountains. Tradition said the Bani Thamud or the Children of Thamud once inhabited these caves. The Arabs believed that these people belonged to one of the lost tribes of Arabia.

The Bani Thamud were a proud and gigantic race, supposedly existing at the time of patriarch Abraham. When they lapsed into idolatry, Allah sent them a prophet from among themselves named Salih to restore them to His righteous path. People refused to listen to him unless he proved the divinity of his mission through a miracle. Salih prayed, and Allah caused a rock to open up. A huge she-camel emerged, and soon after produced a foal and abundant milk.

This miracle convinced some of the Thamudites and they abandoned idolatry. The greater majority, however, remained unimpressed and unchanged. Disappointed, Salih left the camel among the people as a sign from Allah, but warned that a catastrophe would befall them if they did her any harm. For a time, they left the camel to feed quietly in their pastures, but when she drank from a brook or well, she never raised her head, until she had drained the last drop of water.

In return, it was believed, she produced milk to supply the whole tribe. However, as she frightened other camels out of

pastures by her enormous size, she grew odious to the Thamudites. They hamstrung and slew her.

Allah retaliated. He caused a fearful cry to descend from heaven upon the Thamudite people at night, along with great claps of thunder. In the morning, all the offenders lay prostrate on their faces, dead. Thus, to avenge the death of a camel, Allah obliterated a whole race from the face of the earth. The land of the Thamudites remains barren, because, the Arabs still believe, of a persisting curse from heaven.

Allah no longer acts that way. This fact is evident from His silence and inertia even when thousands, if not millions, of people are being killed all over the world, including in Darfur, and innumerable women raped on the African continent. We assume He would intervene more aggressively and angrily if camels were being harmed!

This story had a powerful impact on Muhammad and in later years he refused to let his people camp in the accursed region, instead hurrying them away from it.

A second legend Muhammad heard during his journeys related to the city of Eyla, near the Red Sea. It held that a tribe of Jews dwelt here in ancient times. Like the Thamudites, they had lapsed into idolatry, and in addition they profaned the Sabbath by fishing on that sacred day. Hence, Allah changed their old men into swine and young ones into monkeys. We don't know what had happened to their womenfolk, as Muhammad remained vague about them in the Quran.

The Quran eloquently describes these tales, among others, and they indicate the extent of bias to which Muhammad's youthful mind had been subjected during his journeys.

Muslim writers have described and eulogized many wondrous circumstances which they say attended Muhammad throughout the journeys of his life. For instance, they claim unseen angels hovered over him with their unfolded wings to shield him from the burning sands of the desert and the scorching rays of the sun. On another occasion, a cloud placed itself over his head to intercept the noontime rays. On yet another, a withered tree suddenly put forth leaves and blossomed to give shade to the distressed Muhammad. All these miracles supposedly took place after he had survived many hardships in his childhood. Why Allah did not help him then remains a mystery!

The evidence for these astonishing events does not come from eyewitnesses. Rather, Muhammad himself asserted them (or his zealot followers invented them after his death).

Most Muslims believe in such miracles without raising their eyebrows. During his journey with Abu Talib, Muhammad is said to have met many Christian hermits. Monk Bahira was prominent among them. Conversing with Muhammad, Bahira noted his precocious intellect and eager desire for varied information, especially on matters of religion. It is said that the two spoke often on the subject, and the monk argued forcefully against idolatry, in whose presence the youthful Muhammad was growing up.

The Nestorian Christians, for whom Bahira was a faithful advocate, strenuously forbade the worship of images. They prohibited even their casual exhibition. Indeed, they took their scruples on this matter so far as to ban even the cross, the universal emblem of Christianity.

Muslim writers also stress that Bahira grew interested in the young Muhammad because he had seen the seal of

prophecy on his shoulders. They swear that this sight convinced the monk that Muhammad was, indeed, the prophet foretold by the Christian Scriptures. Reportedly, the monk further warned Abu Talib to keep his nephew from falling into the hands of Jews, thereby forecasting prophetically the opposition that Muhammad would later encounter from them.

However, Bahira's purpose must have involved his own agenda. Since he was a sectarian preacher seeking to proselytize, he needed no miraculous sign to take an interest in the bright, intense Muhammad, and to try to convert him to his own beliefs. He knew Muhammad was not just a receptive listener, but the nephew of the guardian of Ka'aba. He also knew that if he succeeded in planting the seeds of his teachings into Muhammad's tender mind, these doctrines might spread among the Meccans, thereby helping the monk advance his mission by a great leap. Bahira thus already had a strong motive to cultivate the young Muhammad.

Bahira's reported statement to Abu Talib about Jews must have been a precautionary suggestion. In the unsettled state of religious opinion then prevailing in the Arabian Peninsula, the Jewish faith was influencing the Pagans and the monk wanted to prevent it from engulfing his would-be convert. Had that happened, the monk would have lost a good candidate for his faith and suffered a setback for the cause he was duty-bound to promote.

With Abu Talib, Muhammad returned to Mecca, his mind teeming with wild tales and traditions he picked up during his journey through the desert. He remained deeply impressed by the doctrines imparted to him by monk Bahira in the Nestorian monastery, which, as we will note shortly, helped

him tremendously later in his life to shape the doctrines of his own faith.

Muhammad had also developed a mysterious reverence for Syria, believing it to have given refuge to the patriarch Abraham when he had fled from Chaldea, taking with him the doctrine of worshipping one true Allah. His veneration of this country was so deep that some say he initially faced Syria while saying his three daily prayers. [Ibn Ishaq, p. 135]

At home, Muhammad still worked as a shepherd. But when he reached manhood, others employed him as their commercial agent to accompany their trade caravans to Jerusalem, Syria, the Yemen, and other destinations. The fact that his employers gave him charge of trade negates the Muslim claim that Muhammad was illiterate and, therefore, he could not have written the Quran. No one would have given the important post of a commercial agent to an illiterate, since the job required keeping records of trade activities and producing them to the employer on returning to Mecca after long sojourns in distant lands, especially when other somewhat literate Meccans were available for the job. Muhammad's employment as a commercial agent means he must have had at least some literacy. [Cf. R. V. C. Bodley, op. cit. p. 35. According to him, Muhammad had 'little" formal school education, though we know there existed no school in Mecca in his time]

During his journey through Jerusalem, Muhammad saw the Temple of Solomon, on the hill of Moriah. King Solomon had built it for Yahweh who was one among many gods of the ancient people. The Quran erroneously alludes to this Temple as the Farthest Mosque (*Masjid-ul-Aqsa*). However, Mohammad's familiarity with it helped him later to describe it

vividly when he was questioned about his alleged ascension to Seventh Heaven in the darkness of night.

Muslims firmly believe that Muhammad had landed at Jerusalem on his wonder horse Burraq, strode across the plaza — built by Herod to expand the area of the Second Temple — and ascended to heaven at night to hold talks with Allah. When his Pagan adversaries asked him to prove his claim by describing the temple, Allah, it is said, presented its replica in a vision and thus helped him overcome the incredulity of his Meccan tormentors. During their rule over Jerusalem, Muslims built, near the Temple of Solomon, a mosque known as the Dome of Rock to commemorate Muhammad's ascension to heaven. It is also called the Mosque of Hadhrat Umar. It has become, for Muslims, the third holiest place of worship after the Ka'aba in Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina.

King Solomon was the first person to use the oft-repeated Muslim invocation of Allah's glory in a letter he is said to have written to Queen Bilquis of Sheba, some 1700 years before the advent of Islam. All Muslims now utter this invocation every day before doing anything in their lives: "*Bismillah hir Rahman nur Rahim,*" meaning: In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful. [Q 27:30]

The Pagans' invocation consisted of just a single word: "Bismillah." [Ibn Ishaq; p. 173] Likewise, Muhammad used it all along his life, without changing it, though Bismillah never came to him as a revelation from Allah. After his death, his followers added "*hir Rahman ur Rahim*" to it, thus forming the Muslim invocation as it stands today. This invocation is exactly what Solomon had reportedly written at the beginning of his letter to Queen Bilquis of Sheba.

In his early life, Muhammad was no different from other youths of his time. He used to "spend his nights in Mecca as young men did," [Ibn Ishaq, p. 81] in quarters where whores offered sex to youths whom they expected to protect them in times of perils. His marriage with Khadija altered his lifestyle to a degree, but probably not enough for him to abandon his earlier habit entirely.

Muhammad also often attended fairs, which in Arabia were not always mere business venues, but occasionally scenes of poetic contests, with prizes awarded to the victors. The fair of Oqadh enjoyed special fame in this regard, and poems judged the best here are said to have adorned the walls of the Ka'aba. At those fairs, contestants from monotheistic Jews and Christians, and idolatrous Arabs and fire-worshipping Persians preached the popular traditions and doctrines of their religions without rivalry or fear of hostility. Among the preachers was Kuss ibn Saida, Christian bishop of Najran. Daily from the back of his tall camel, he spoke of his faith. For hours, he would talk of the futility of this life and of the glories of the world to come. Muhammad listened to these orations, yet often in later years he preached from the back of his own camel and his sermons had many of the exhortations of this Christian prelate.[1 R.V.C. Bodley, op. cit. p. 34]

Most of what Muhammad had learned here in Oqadh became the essential creeds and doctrines of his religion. All Muslims must follow them to ensure their admission into the Gardens of bliss in their next life.

As it was customary with his tribe, Muhammad also used to retire to a cave in Mount Hira to practice penance on the 10th of Muharram, a day also sacred to Jews. He also fasted on

this day. [Philip K. Hitti, o*p. cit*. p. 133; Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, p. 132]

Muslims venerate Muhammad for being abstemious in his physical life. This point of view contradicts a natural phenomenon. He was part of a society that must have made him susceptible to most, if not all, of its practices. If he wanted the protection of his tribe, without which none could survive in the hostile and ever-feuding Arabian societies, he must have participated in most of its indulgences, which included drinking wine and a stinking liquor called *maghafir*. The native Arabs made *maghafir* by extracting juice from the palm-trees and fermenting it. [Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *Asmani Quran Sharif*, p. 902] Calling it a "wholesome drink," Allah asked Muslims to treat the palm-date's and the vine's ability to produce the drink as a Sign from Him, [Q 16:67] a way not only to understand Him better, but to perceive His kindness to His best creation!

That Muhammad was a habitual drinker is confirmed by Phillip K. Hitti, an eminent historian of Islam. He writes: "Khamr, made of dates was the favourite. Ibn Khaldun argues that such personages as al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun used only nabidh, prepared by soaking grapes, raisins or dates in water and allowing the juice to ferment slightly. Such drink was judged legal under certain conditions by at least one school of Moslem jurisprudence, the Hanafite. Muhammad himself drank it, especially before it was three days old." [Op. cit. p. 337. He cites Islamic sources, like Mishkah, vol. ii, pp.172-3; ibn Hanbal, Musnad (Cairo, 1313), vol.i, pp. 240, 287, 320; Bukhari, vol. vi, p.232, in support of his claim]

Because the Arabs were generally addicted to alcohol, Muhammad did not actually describe drinking as *haram* or

"forbidden" in the strict sense of the word. Rather, he required the Pagan-turned- Muslims not to offer their prayer while drunk, [Q 4:43] and that they try to "avoid or refrain" from drinking. [Q 5:93, 94] He, thus, partly replicated in the Quran the injunction the Bible has imposed on Jews and Christians. [Leviticus, 10:9]

Overall, since Muhammad himself drank *maghafir* and wine, he must have thought it prudent to remain vague about drinking. At the same time, he must have considered it politic to ask his followers gently to moderate their intake of alcohol, he himself having no doubt experienced and suffered from the adverse impact of excessive drinking.

Muhammad and the Pagan World

Before Islam, the Pagan Arabs practiced the following religious rites and ceremonies, among others:

- They observed three principal fasts per year, of seven, nine, and thirty days. During their fasts, they ate and drank, but did not talk. [Inference drawn from the Quran's verse 19:26] They named their period of silence *sawm*, or fast.

- They prayed three times a day — around sunrise, at noon, and around sunset — turning their faces toward the Ka'aba. [Washington Irving, *Mahomet and His Associates*, p. 31]

- They performed a yearly pilgrimage or hajj, which required them to: 1) circumambulate the Ka'aba seven times; 2) run between the two hills of Safa and Marwa, on each of which stood a male and a female idol; 3) sacrifice animals in the name of the deities; and 4) having their heads shaved if they were males, and a few locks of hair shorn off if they were females.

The Pagans' Allah is believed to have had all the characteristics of a man. This deity was also known as *ar-Rahim* (the Compassionate) and *ar-Rahman-an* (the Merciful) to the people of Northern and Southern Arabia. The inscription (542-3) of Abrahah, dealing with the break of the Ma'rib Dam, attests to the latter fact. The inscription begins, "In the power and grace and mercy of the Merciful (*Rahman-an*) and His messiah and of the Holy Spirit." The name *ar-Rahman-an* is especially significant because "the Merciful" later became a prominent attribute of Allah, and one of His 99 names in the Quran. In fact, *ar-Rahman* dominates Sura 19 of the Quran. Though used in the inscription for the Christian God, the word is evidently borrowed from the name of one of the older South Arabian deities. [See Phillip K. Hitti, *op. cit*. p. 105]

In truth, Muhammad, at the beginning of his career as a prophet, had required his followers to worship the idol of Allah. He changed this commandment later as he came to believe that Allah had no form or shape, thus distinguishing his religion from those of the Pagans and other polytheists.

Apart from the stated rites, the Pagans had many other religious traditions, some of which they acquired in early times from Jews. They are also said to have nurtured their devotional feelings with the Book of Psalms, as well as with a book of moral discourses, supposedly written by Seth who, according to the Biblical stories, was one of Adam's many sons. (Curiously, he had no daughters.) Adam was the first human being, whom Allah created with His own hands out of mud, mixing dust with water. Thus, unlike all other people, Adam took shape fully formed and did not have to pass through infancy, childhood, and adolescence.

We may pause here and briefly discuss a psychological observation. It is known that belief can blunt human reasoning and override common sense. Why? One reason is that ideas inculcated in a person's mind in childhood remain forever in the background of his thinking even if they have no rational validity. Such a person will want to make facts conform to his indoctrinated ideas. This burden has handicapped even learned scholars and inhibited them from using their common sense. It is not that they never use it in religious enterprises. Rather, they use it only when it corroborates their inculcated ideas.

Mankind's faculties of perception and rationalization have enabled the solution of impressive scientific problems, but in matters of religious and political beliefs, the same species is, unfortunately, willing to trample on the evidence of reason and senses.

Evaluating Muhammad from this perspective, one finds that he was an amazingly rare and remarkable person. Though raised in a particular religious environment, yet when the situation required it, he not only threw off his indoctrination about idolatry, but also introduced and elaborated on a new religion that suited his interests. His metamorphosis was possible because he was an extremely capable man, with tremendous patience and lust for power.

We know Muhammad was a tyrant and a pedophile. We detest him for what he did to the Pagans and Jews. We are rightly critical of his utterances. We justifiably castigate him for urging his followers to treat their women inhumanely. And we know, with some certainty, that he was a sadist who inflicted psychological pain on his wives. But to the people of his land, he was truly a reformer. Through a movement, which

he had essentially begun against the sedentary Quraish of Mecca, Muhammad ultimately brought nearly all the people of the Arabian Peninsula together in one religion, which enabled them to swiftly conquer almost one third of the earth. Had he not united them in this religious bond, the nomads of Saudi Arabia might still be squabbling among themselves!

Driven by his strong spirit of tribalism, Muhammad also provided his Meccan kindred with a permanent source of income by retaining in Islam the Pagan ritual of hajj. Later on, a vast number of the non-Arabs, falling into the trap of Islam, undertook the responsibility of supporting the whole people of Saudi Arabia by spending their hard-earned money on a ritual that was originally intended only for the peninsular Arabs. Can we imagine the financial hardships the Saudi Arabians would have faced before the discovery of oil if he had not made hajj a key ritual of Islam?

The Saudis — beneficiaries of the longstanding economic windfall from hajj —recognize the unintentional gift Muhammad gave them, and they have been paying it back to him by not only holding fast to his wild doctrines, which were "foolish and nonsense" [Q 25:30] to their Pagan ancestors, but also by using their wealth to spread them among people in every nook and cranny of the globe. The havoc that this strategy has wrought in the world is now a well-documented fact. Thus, any attempt to downplay the Saudis' involvement with Islam and the ultimate threat they pose to the world's non-Muslim population will simply increase our peril.

Contrary to Muslim conviction that Allah had originally created Muhammad as a believer in his Oneness, we know Muhammad worshipped and offered sacrifices to *al-Uzza,* an idol, the Pagans believed, was one of the three daughters of

Allah. [Cf. Q 43:16] The Quraish venerated *al-Uzza* highly, believing that she could intercede on their behalf with Allah, her father. One of Muhammad's uncles was named after this idol; he was called *Abd al-Uzza*, the slave of *Uzza,* before his Muslim foes nicknamed him *Abu Lahab,* the Father of Flame, to show their anger and hatred of him. On Muhammad's Pagan backgrounds, F. E. Peters writes, "According to a famous, though much edited, tradition, it was young Muhammad who was the Pagan and Zayd ibn Amr a monotheist." He also quotes Zayd ibn Haritha, who is said to have told his son, "The Prophet slaughtered a ewe for one of the idols (*nusub min al-ansab*); then he roasted it and carried it with him." ['*Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*', p. 126]

While preaching the Oneness of Allah, Muhammad continued, in one form or another, to venerate the idols — until he conquered Mecca when he finally had all the idols inside and outside the Ka'aba destroyed.

The Indispensable Lady

When working for the Meccan merchants, Muhammad saw how much money they were earning. He also saw how they spent their wealth on improving their own and their children's lives. The memory of his own childhood plight convinced him that the wealthy merchants of Mecca not only neglected the city's poor and needy, but were also unkind to the orphans. He also expected them to oppose him and his religion [Cf. Q 43:23] when he preached it among them. He, therefore, vowed to force the merchants one day to share their wealth with him and the city's poor.

Muhammad also bore ill-will toward the custodians of the Ka'aba. He felt they did not deserve their positions, as they were not righteous. [Q 8:34] He believed that by misusing their

authority, they avoided sharing the temple's revenues with those to whom a portion of them rightfully belonged. In his judgment, its only and proper guardians were those individuals who feared Allah and were willing to share the temple's wealth with the poor and orphans of Mecca.

His financial independence from his well-paid job gave him an opportunity to reflect on the treatment he had received from the women of the Abd al-Mutallib and Abu Talib families. He also recalled his abandonment in Mecca by his mother. These experiences instilled in him a sense of bitterness towards his mother, in particular, and other women, in general.

And the recurrence in his mind of the past humiliations, insults, betrayals, and other ill treatments kindled his tribal instincts of retribution. He vowed to avenge these wrongs in a subtle, systematic, and effective manner. Hence, he had Allah reveal verses to him that clearly speak about the suffering that lingered in his mind from his childhood. One reads:

"*Your wives are as a tilth unto you: So approach your tilth when or how ye will: But do some good act for your souls beforehand; and fear Allah, and know that ye are to meet Him (in the Hereafter) and give these (good) tidings to those who believe.*" [Q 2:223]

The translator was dishonest here. He intentionally rendered the Arabic word *nisaa* as "wives," rather than "women" to mislead Muslims and other readers of the Quran. The word "*nisaa*" in the verse includes mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, slave-girls, and other women over whom men exert their control. Effectively permitting Muslim men to rape their women ("Approach your tilth "where, [Cf. Q 2:222] when or how ye will"), but only after doing some good to

compensate for the heinous crime they are about to commit, Allah also told His beloved followers:

"*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, great (above you all).*" [Q 4:34]

This verse has received notoriety due to the notion that it allows Muslim men to beat their "wives," but hardly has anyone truly understood its meaning and implications. To make our contention clear, we emphasize the following:

-This verse is part of a Sura that is titled "Women," or "An-Nisaa" in Arabic.

-The word 'husbands" is not in the original; instead, we find "men."

-The word "wives," or *azwajaka* in Arabic, is not in the original either; instead, we see "women."

-This verse relates to a situation in Muhammad's time when 'the eldest son inherited his father's widows with the flocks and the tents. Incest between son and stepmother thus was not only lawful but obligatory.' [R. V. C. Bodley, *op. cit*. p. 226]

-This verse has no connection with those that precede and follow it. In other words, it is not contextual and the instruction it contains stands on its own.

Keeping these facts in mind, what do we find in the verse? It says that Muslim men are the protectors and maintainers of women, as they support them financially (and in Muhammad's time and in many parts of the third world today, men commonly support their fathers, mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters if they cannot support themselves).

Therefore, women should obey their men and guard what Allah wants them to guard (that is, their private parts). (The word "the husbands" is an addition by the translator(s).) But if men simply "fear" disloyalty and bad behavior from the women under their patronage, they must first warn them. If they still feel fear, they must refuse to sleep with them. And if their fear persists, the men must beat them. However, if the women "return to obedience" — presumably, extinguish the fear — then the men must not seek "means of annoyance," — presumably, further punishment — against them.

We ask: Could Allah really have, on one hand, retained in Islam one of the despicable practices of the Pagans and, on the other, kill them on the ground that they were not following His righteous path? Could He really have allowed jealous and paranoid males to beat all the women under their control, for no reason but their own anxiety? And if He did, was He out of His mind at the time? Or did the verse emanate from a man who had had bad experiences with his women and, consequently, suggested for himself and others easy ways to humiliate and punish them, even when they (women) had not committed any sin or crime?

Muhammad's hatred of women remained with him for as long he lived. This Hadith captures his attitude:

Narrated Usama bin Zaid:The Prophet said, "After me I have not left any affliction more harmful to men than women." [Bukhari, vol. 7, Book 62, Number 33]

Unsatisfied by his strictures against women on earth, Muhammad consigned far more of them than men to the blazing pit of Hell, declaring, *"O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women). …You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you…."* [Bukhari; vol. 1, Book 6, Number 301]

That is, Allah's creations suffered eternal agony because: 1) They weren't grateful enough to their husbands who might lawfully beat them; 2) They were too forgetful and deficient in religion, for which reasons Allah decreed that the testimony of two women was equal to that of one man; [Q 2:282] and 3) They are too stupid to pass the IQ test for heaven.

We do not know how many men Allah sent to Hell for insufficient gratitude to their wives or lack of brains and the ability to win debates!

As time passed, young Muhammad became determined to fulfill his life's ambitions. The more he thought about them, the more plans leapt to his mind. As he talked to his friends and acquaintances, he gained input from them as well on their common concerns. Their positive thoughts and responses helped him prepare to go on the offensive to realize the goals he had set for himself.

By 25, Muhammad had finalized the details of his plan. He was also at a prime time to get married, but he could not wed any free and eligible woman, as he lacked enough money or camels to give as dowers to a woman's father or guardian.

After fully considering his situation, he concluded that he needed a woman who not only wouldn't demand a dowry, but could support him financially as he sought to attain his goals. Knowing that few women in Mecca and its environs met these requirements, he decided to wait and see what came his way.

At this time, there lived in Mecca a widow named Khadija, a daughter of Khuwalid, of the tribe of Quraish. She had been twice married. Her last husband, a wealthy merchant, had recently died and she had to hire help to manage her business interests. Khadija had a cousin named Waraqa ibn Nofal. He was a professed monotheist and is believed to have translated parts of the Gospels into Arabic. He wielded much influence over Khadija who was allegedly a regular reader of his works. [Sir John Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 68] Both held near-identical views on religious matters, but when they differed, the opinion of Waraqa always prevailed.

Muhammad had become acquainted with Khuzaima, a nephew of Khadija, during his business trips to Syria. Khuzaima had seen him conduct his business in an efficient, profitable manner, and he was impressed. After their return home, they met frequently in and around the temple of Ka'aba, where Muhammad loved to spend his time after completing, in the manner of hajj, seven circuits around the idol-filled shrine.

One day, Muhammad expressed his desire to Khuzaima to find a job that paid more money. He replied that his aunt Khadija was looking for a capable agent and that he might be a perfect candidate. He promised to talk to her about him and try to arrange an interview for him with her. Khuzaima kept

his word and talked to Khadija. She agreed to meet the candidate as soon as possible.

At the appointed time, Muhammad presented himself before Khadija. She saw a young man of medium stature, inclined to slimness, with a large head, broad shoulders, and an otherwise perfectly proportioned body. His hair and beard were thick, black, and slightly curled. His hair reached midway between the lobes of his ears and his shoulders, and his beard was of similar length. He had a noble breadth of forehead and the ovals of his large brownish eyes were wide, with exceptionally long lashes and extensive brows, slightly arched. His nose was aquiline and his mouth was wide and finely shaped.

Although he let his beard grow, he never allowed his moustache hair to protrude over his upper lip. His skin was white but tanned by the desert sun. [See Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 35] His voice had a touch of music and his sentences were as rhythmic as the lines of famed Arabian poet Labid. He possessed the latter quality even though he had had no institutional education. Khadija was highly impressed, and she hired Muhammad to run her business.

Muhammad became a fully literate man, after he received the first revelation from Allah. With Allah's help, he also developed the ability to write on parchment with pen and ink. [Cf. Verse 29:48. Also see verse 31.27] This fact is mentioned in the Quran and the Quran could not be wrong on this and other issues!

She assigned her nephew Khuzaima and her slave girl Maisara to Muhammad so that they could assist him during the trade missions he was expected to lead to Jerusalem, Syria, the Yemen, and other destinations. He carried out those

missions diligently, earning further admiration from his employer. She afterwards sent him to the southern Arabia on similar pursuits, in all of which he achieved successes beyond his employer's expectation. At every opportunity to prove his worth, Muhammad did his best to excel and endear himself to Khadija. Each time she heard of his latest achievement, her esteem and affection for him rose.

As Muhammad was applying all his talent to the ladder of success, Khadija turned 40. Her age had enabled her to gather valuable experience and develop the judgment that was necessary to lead a successful life. She longed for a partner who could give her all that she had been missing since her husband's death. She considered many candidates, but in the end her choice fell on Muhammad.

Although her heart yearned for the fresh and comely youth, she restrained herself before acting to fulfill her desire. She had to overcome the ancient Arab tradition that barred women of her age from getting married, together with the objections she expected from her immediate family members. Of particular concern was the attitude of her uncle, Amr ibn Asaad whose approval she needed to marry the man of her choice. She had to create a situation that would not only make Muhammad appear special, but force her uncle as well to sanction her marriage with him.

Soon an opportunity presented itself. One day at noon Khadija was with her maids outside her house, watching Muhammad's caravan arrive. Suddenly, an errant patch of cloud appeared on the horizon, momentarily blocking the sun's rays. Seizing the opportunity, she shouted to her maids, "Behold! It is the beloved of Allah [i.e., the Pagan deity "Allah"], who sent two angels to watch over him!"

Her maids strained their eyes to discern the angels, but saw none. Yet they had inklings of their mistress's passion toward her heartthrob, Muhammad, so they joined hands with her and repeated her words loudly. Khadija's purpose, of course, was to boost Muhammad's image by creating a sense of divine favor, while warning her uncle of the consequences from heaven should he reject his proposal to marry her.

Having created a foundation for her cause, she offered herself secretly in marriage to Muhammad through her trusted slave Maisara. Muhammad had been waiting for such an opportunity, and when it came, he accepted it at once. The major success thus achieved, he then, as the Arabian tradition required, had to formally propose marriage through Khadija's uncle Amr ibn Assad, who acted as her guardian, her father having been killed in a war.

Arab marriage traditions differ vastly from those of the most non-Arab Muslims. An Arab groom has to propose to his would-be bride through her parents or guardians, and if they agree, he must pay dowers to his betrothed's parents or guardians for granting him the permission to marry their daughter or ward. The Arabian marriages were, and still are, based on contract, with religion playing no role in them. [R. V. C. Bodley, *op. cit*. p. 227. He quotes Muhammad as saying: "The marriage rite was not to be a religious observance."] The case is different with the non-Arab Muslims, especially those of the Indian subcontinent, where nearly half of the world's Muslims live. There, brides pay dowers to their would-be husbands to induce them to marry them. They do so, despite their ardent desire to live according to the traditions of the unruly and hypocritical Bedouin Arabs [Cf. Q 9:97] of Islam's holy land – to whom they are nothing today but beggars

(*miskin*) – in the belief that they will thus grow closer to their beloved Prophet whose intercession with Allah may persuade Him to pardon their sins on the Day of Judgment!

Following their tradition, Abu Talib and Hamza, two of Muhammad's uncles, accompanied their nephew to Khadija's house, where she secretly arranged a party. She had not, it seems, broken the news to her uncle, and she intentionally kept him unaware of the significance of the occasion. In the presence of everyone, Muhammad asked Amr ibn Assad for Khadija's hand in marriage. The old man flew into a rage and vetoed the union. He explained that everything was against such an idea: Muhammad's age, his position as Khadija's employee, and, above all, his lack of money to justify his marriage with a wealthy lady. In his mind, the marriage meant dispersing her wealth, instead of keeping it in her family. Events would prove the old man right.

Khadija had anticipated this reaction and prepared to handle it adroitly. She plied her uncle with wine until he was drunk. On cue, Abu Talib delivered a forceful argument, laying out all the splendid qualities of his nephew. Next, Khadija herself gave a fiery speech, stressing how the angels had protected him from heat and highlighting all the deeds that Muhammad had performed for her and the family. In the end, she exhorted her uncle to recognize Muhammad's fine traits and accept him as a son-in-law. After Khadija's speech, all present prompted Amr ibn Assad to respond.

Before Assad knew quite what he was doing, he made a speech in which he approved the marriage. Waraqa ibn Nofal promptly seconded it. Muhammad then at once clothed the old man in the robe which, by Arabian tradition, a son-in-law gives his father-in-law at the wedding. Khadija immediately

had the terms of the contract laid out, thus concluding the marriage before her uncle could realize that he was duped and declare the marriage void. This marriage is said to have taken place in 595 A.D., when Muhammad was 25 and his bride 40.

Muhammad's marriage to Khadija deserves special attention not only because it was a milestone in the life of the future Prophet of Islam, but also because it illustrates the position women occupied in pre-Islamic Arabia. As we have noted, Khadija was an independent woman who ran her own business and she, not her future husband, had first proposed the marriage. Other women in pre-Islamic days took part in the affairs of Mecca by the side of their men and ran business ventures without the involvement of their men. [R.V.C. Bodley, op. cit. pp. 23 & 24]

Moreover, they often exercised considerable influence as prophets or poets. At annual fairs in the neighborhood of Mecca, particularly at the fair of Oqhad, women entered poetry contests with men and recited their prize-winning poems to the public. Khadija's marriage gives us a glimpse of the freedom that Arabian women enjoyed before the dawn of Islam, and negates the claim of the Muslim doctors who tell us that Islam granted women the freedoms they have in the modern times. The opposite is true.

Islam not only snatched away much of women's previous freedom and liberties, but it enslaved them to the whims of their men. Moreover, in the sight of Allah, women are deficient in memory. Therefore, two of them are equal to one man.

As Muhammad expected, his marriage to Khadija changed his life. He suddenly ranked among the richest and most influential men of Mecca. He was no longer a servant; to the

contrary, he became the owner of his wife's wealth and business. People respected his new status. Those men, who occupied higher position in the Meccan society, let him participate in both their casual and formal meetings, an important privilege that they had denied him before on account of his circumstances.

During this time, Muhammad lived in a household where the resident oracle greatly influenced him in his religious opinions. This was his wife's cousin Waraqa ibn Nofal, a man of speculative mind and flexible faith: originally a Jew, later a Christian, and throughout a believer in astrology.

Muhammad continued to work for his wife as before, but now with a freedom that gave him much time to continue to build his image before the people of Mecca. He carried himself well socially and soon established himself as a role model, not only by dispensing favors at cost to his wife, but by dealing with people even-handedly in situations that offered him the sought-after opportunities to take part. Herein, we shall describe a crisis that involved the Meccan people and which, we are told, he helped resolve amicably, thereby earning the admiration of all the people of the city.

In 605 A.D., when Muhammad was 35, the people of Quraish decided to roof the Ka'aba, which apparently had consisted of just four walls. Examination of the masonry revealed that these walls were too weak to support a roof, whereupon the Meccans decided to level the whole structure and erect a new, roofed edifice in its place. After building the walls, the people had to find the wooden planks and a carpenter to make the roof, for neither then existed in the entire land of Arabia.

During this time, it so happened that a ship belonging to a Greek merchant wrecked in the Red Sea, possibly on the coral reefs of Jeddah. This accident provided the desperate Meccans with the ship's timbers for the roof, which an Egyptian Copt carpenter, by chance in Mecca at the time, constructed at their behest.

This story highlights an important aspect of the Meccan life in Muhammad's time. If the House of Allah lacked a roof, it bolsters the position of those who maintain that the homes of the Meccan themselves must also have lacked roofs over their homes.

Builders of the primitive Ka'aba had placed a large black stone, possibly a meteorite, in one of its walls. The Pagans regarded it with peculiar veneration. When the new walls reached the level at which the black stone had been planted, each clan of the Quraish demanded the privilege of returning the stone to its original position. Hot debate ensued, and violence, even bloodshed, seemed imminent.

At this moment, Abu Umaiya of the clan of Bani Makhzoom, said to be the oldest man of the Quraish tribe, came up with a suggestion. He proposed that all present should agree that the next man to enter the court of the Ka'aba should judge the dispute. All agreed and commenced awaiting the man's appearance.

A few minutes later, Muhammad entered the sacred premises. Informed of the Meccans' pact, he called for a cloak, spread it on the ground, and laid the black stone on it. He then asked one representative of every clan to seize the edge of the cloak and had them raise the stone together to the proper height. Then he laid the stone in position in the wall with his own hands. Thus he resolved a deadly issue with a brilliant

presence of mind. This episode enhanced his esteem and prompted people to refer their disputes to him for resolution.

The Angel in the Cave

After Muhammad married Khadija, but before he began preaching the Oneness of Allah, many religiously sensitive men in Mecca are said to have withdrawn from the idol worshipping of Ka'aba. Prominent among them were Waraqa ibn Nofal, Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh, Othman ibn al-Huwayrith, and Zaid ibn Amr. Many other Pagans also converted to monotheism, realizing that their people had corrupted the religion of their father Abraham and that the idols they circled devoutly were of no account. Overall, they sought a change in the form and substance of their antiquated religion. Others, disillusioned with Judaism and Christianity, searched elsewhere in the land for Hanifiya, the pure religion of Abraham that shunned idolatry. [Ibn Ishaq, 99]

They particularly wanted to reintroduce Hanifiya because they believed it was based on fairness. It was the absence of Hanifiya, they reckoned, that had turned the custodians of the House of Allah into callous beings who did not care for the abysmally poor and hungry. They wanted to remove the Ka'aba from the grip of these selfish people, so that all the people of Mecca could enjoy fairness and justice.

Muhammad himself was grappling with these thoughts. He was wondering: Had not nearly six hundred years passed since the death of Christ? Was it not time for another prophet to appear to reform the world? The 360 idols cluttering the Ka'aba and the treatment he received from his Quraish relative certainly suggested it.

The manipulative and opportunistic Waraqa ibn Nofal, having closely observed some of the Meccans' disenchantment

with idol worship, felt that the time had come for him to introduce his doctrines of One Allah and Resurrection. Unable to do it himself, he sought a man from among the key tribes of Mecca to carry the banner. He consulted his sister Khadija, and lo! Both found a candidate in their midst by the name of Muhammad Mustafa who met all their criteria to accomplish the arduous and risky task. When they confided in him their plan, they found him more than willing to cooperate – and not merely for their sake. He himself cherished a dream to dislodge the Ka'aba custodians from their positions and rein in the Meccan trading community, which he considered a selfish and greedy bunch of despicable humans.

Since his marriage, Muhammad had plenty of time to reflect on what he had learned during his caravan journeys and from pilgrims and traders who came to Mecca. The words of the hermit Bahira also recurred to him, giving him the conviction that the idolatrous Pagans should be made to worship only one true Allah, whose nemesis was already living in the form of a statue in the Ka'aba, and that this Allah should rule their hearts and minds. Muhammad chose the name "Allah" for his lone deity, as the Pagans were already acquainted with Him and he wouldn't have to explain the deity's qualities and attributes afresh to them.

Thus resolved, Muhammad wanted no delay in implementing his doctrines, most of which originated in Judaism and Christianity, and lay haphazardly stored in his memory. His early-life preparations notwithstanding, he realized his mission faced enormous challenges, and to overcome them he needed to learn more about the Jewish Torah and the Christian Scripture. He also desired to know as much as was possible about the Talmud and Midrash

traditions, then current among the Jewish groups. Waraqa concurred, and they decided that Muhammad begin his learning sessions forthwith.

The tutorial sessions could not begin from the homes of Khadija or Waraqa, lest the people of the city come to know about it. Muhammad, perhaps influenced by those Christian hermits whom he had seen living in caves on his trips to Syria, chose a cave on Mount Hira for the purpose. Muhammad and Waraqa took to spending most of their time in the cave, often joined by Khadija who, as noted earlier, had studied the Gospels at Waraqa's urging. Waraqa found that his new student had an uncommonly sharp, retentive memory and a voracious appetite for learning. He poured out all his knowledge of Torah, Bible, Midrash and Talmud, fully aware that his student would have to depend heavily on what he taught him at the time of spreading his new faith among the Pagans.

As the tutoring process unfolded, Waraqa realized that he alone could not prepare Muhammad fully for his momentous mission, and that if he wanted his surrogate to succeed, he must seek the help of one whose erudition on these subjects far exceeded his own. It was, no doubt, a shrewd decision, for had he failed to fully prepare Muhammad, the mission the latter was going to embark upon would have collapsed sooner than later in the face of strong opposition of the Pagans.

Waraqa knew a monk called Adas — some say his name was Suhaib ibn Sinan —who was well-versed in the desired subjects, and spoke Hebrew. Waraqa, who also understood Hebrew well, enlisted his help, and they both began teaching Muhammad all they knew about the Jewish and Christian religions.

Perhaps it was the monk Adas or Suhaib [Q16:103] whom Muhammad alluded to, when refuting the Pagans who accused him of having been taught by a human being in every sphere—including the details of heaven and Hell— and not by Allah.

Muhammad continued the learning process for a long time; some say, without substantiation, that it lasted 15 years. Then suddenly one night in the month of Ramadhan, in the year 610 A. D., when Muhammad was 40, he declared that he had received revelations from Allah, and that He appointed him his last Prophet (*Nabi*) for the people of Mecca.

The age 40 has great significance for Muslims. Muhammad declared that, upon reaching this age, they should pray to Allah, thank Him for the favors He has bestowed on them and their parents, and commence good works that will please Him. He required Muslims to be kind to their parents, because their mothers bear them with much pain. He also required them to be thankful to their parents. [Q 46:15] He did not, however, call upon them to love their parents for what they did to them after they were born.

One Muslim school of thought reports that Muhammad told Khadija that, while he was in the cavern, the angel Gabriel appeared to him "in a dazzling human form" [R.V. C. Bodley, op. cit., p. 56] and ordered him to "recite in the name of thy Lord." [Q 96:1] Later on, he told Muslims that all angels can fly, each of them having at least a pair of wings, [Q 35:1] except for Gabriel, who is said to have six hundred of them. [Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Tafsir Ma'ariful Quran*, p. 764; Sahih Bukhari: Vol. 4, Book 54, Number 455]

At a later date, Muhammad repudiated this statement with the following line in the Quran:

"*Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel — for he brings down the [revelation] to thy heart by Allah's Will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe.*" [Q 2:97]

This statement clearly implies that the Quran contains words imparted to Muhammad through his heart by the angel Gabriel and also that this angel never appeared to him in person. Accordingly, we may safely conclude that the language in the Quran is Muhammad's own, which he used for describing the inspirations the angel, at Allah's command, put in his heart— or should we say, in his mind.

Muhammad — like the ancient Hebrew prophets before him, who were often reluctant to utter the words of Allah — protested to Gabriel that he was unschooled and hence, he could not obey his command. [Karen Armstrong, *op. cit*. p. 137] A storied Hadith attributed to his youngest wife, Aisha, recounts that Gabriel pressed Muhammad's chest against his own three times [Martin Lings, *op. cit*. p. 43] to make him follow his command. Instantly, Muhammad felt his understanding illumined with the celestial light and he read the first five verses of the Sura al-Iqraa, [Q Sura 96] written on a banner that he saw hanging in the faraway sky nearest the earth. When he finished, the heavenly Messenger announced, "Oh, Muhammad, of a verity, thou art the Prophet of Allah! and I am his angel Gabriel!"

After the incident, we are told, Muhammad was horrified to think that he might have become a mere disrespectable *kahin*, whom people consulted if one of their camels went missing. A Jinn, one of the capricious spirits thought to haunt the desert and lead people into error, supposedly possessed a *kahin*. Poets also believed that their personal Jinn possessed

them. Others worshipped them. [Ibn Ishaq; p. 149] Thus Hasan ibn Thabit, a poet of Medina who later became a Muslim and Muhammad's personal poet-laureate reportedly said that when he received his poetic vocation, his personal Jinn appeared to him, threw him to the ground, and forced the inspired words from his mouth. This was the only form of inspiration that Muhammad was familiar with, and the thought that he might have become a *majnoon* — a Jinn - possessed individual — filled him with such despair that he no longer wished to live. [Karen Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 137 ff] His wife Khadija reportedly talked him out of suicide.

Much later, Allah told Muhammad that, in addition to deputing him as a Prophet for men, He had also given him the responsibility to convert the errant Jinns [Washington Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 71] to the righteous path of Islam. Later, Allah certified that Muhammad fulfilled this task to His complete and fullest satisfaction.

The Muslim belief that Muhammad had a physical encounter with angel Gabriel is more myth than fact. Later Muslims concocted it to boost his credentials as a Prophet. Not only do many cynics disbelief it, but even many Muslim scholars regard this alleged involvement of the angel with Muhammad as the imaginative falsehood of some Islamic zealots.

Professor Fazlur Rahman is one prominent Muslim scholar who repudiated the affair without hesitation. He maintains that Muhammad did not encounter Gabriel in the flesh and that the contents of the Quran arose from his internal mystical experience, generated by Allah's inspiration [Cf. Q 4:163] "in a state of vision or quasi-dream." Rahman notes that Muhammad himself had said, "Then I woke up," after

receiving a revelation, implying clearly that all the revelations came to him in dreams or trances. “This idea of the externality of the angel and the Revelation,” Rahman states, “has become so ingrained in the general Muslim mind that the real picture is anathema to it.” He stresses that “a religion cannot lie on purely spiritualized dogmas and [that] reification is necessary even if only to serve the purpose of a vessel for the spirit.” [Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 13]

Rahman’s position differs somewhat from a Hadith attributed to Hadhrat Zubair. Muhammad is reported to have told him that, while in the cave of Hira, he heard a voice calling him by name and declaring him the Prophet of Allah. He searched all around but found no one. He then looked up and saw an angel floating in the space between the earth and the sky. [The Quran’s verses 53:6-11, 81:23 support Zubair’s Hadith. According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad in a visible form with the first five verses of Sura Iqraa. See his note 5092 to verse 53:13]

Convulsing with fear, his heart throbbing, [According to Ali Dashti, epilepsy is known to occur in persons who lead a double life, an ordinary one combined with a shadowy, phantom-filled, shoreless inner life] Muhammad ran home. Khadija wrapped him up in a mantle and tended him. After a while, the angel Gabriel appeared at his home and commanded him to “arise and deliver thy warning, O thou wrapped up!” According to this Hadith, Sura al-Muddaththir [Q, Sura 74] was the first Sura revealed to Muhammad and not Sura al-Iqraa, [Q Sura 96] as most Muslims believe.

The majority of Muhammad’s biographers do not agree with the above putative Hadith. Instead, they maintain he

received all his revelations from Allah, in dreams or during the seizures he suffered throughout his life.

During these painful episodes, Muhammad heard bells ringing in his ears and pearl-sized drops of perspiration trickled down his body even in winter. [Martin Lings. *op. cit*., p. 245] When fully recovered, he related the contents of the vision. But this is also not completely true and we shall prove it momentarily.

Muhammad suffered from epilepsy, a medical condition mysterious to the people of his time. Dr. Gustav Weil, in a note to *Muhammad der Prophet*, discusses the idea that Muhammad had this ailment, which Muslims have generally represented as a slander spread by his enemies and Christian writers. However, some of the oldest Muslim biographers (labeled "hired biographers" by some modern Muslim writers) seem to attest to its presence, [Rafiq Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Quran*] and other contemporary writers make similar assertions.

A violent trembling would take hold of Muhammad, they say, followed by a kind of swoon or, more accurately, convulsion, during which perspiration would stream from his forehead in the coldest weather. He would lie with his eyes closed, foaming at the mouth and bellowing like a young camel. Aisha, one of his wives, and Zaid, a disciple, are among the cited witnesses. They regarded the seizures as arising from the revelation. However, he is believed to have had similar attacks in Mecca before he became a Prophet and when no one claims he received revelations from Allah. [Washington Irving, *op. cit*., pp.43-44]

Unaware of Muhammad's medical condition, Khadija feared that an evil Jinn had possessed him and wanted a

conjuror to exorcise the spirit, but Muhammad forbade it. He did not like people seeing him during these paroxysms.

The epileptic attacks did not always precede his visions. Harith ibn Hisham, it is said, once asked Muhammad how he received his revelations. "Often," he replied, "the angel appears to me in a human form, and speaks to me. Sometimes, I hear sounds like the tinkling of a bell, but see nothing. When the invisible angel has departed, I am possessed of what he has revealed." Some of his revelations, he professed, reached him directly from Allah and others in dreams, for the dreams of prophets, he used to say, are revelations. He is also reported to have received many revelations through angel Gabriel while being in bed with Aisha!

Interestingly, no one other than Muhammad saw the angel Gabriel in person, nor heard them talking to each other. Not even his wife Aisha! This had led the Pagans to call him a liar and a mentally defective man. Where they wrong, we wonder?

Preacher in the Hills

After Muhammad came home with the news that Allah made him a prophet, Khadija not only comforted him in his fear, but also professed to believe what he had told her — thereby becoming the first convert to Islam. To accelerate her husband's mission, she even spoke the words of the *Kalima Tayyaba*, through whose recitation a non-Muslim instantly becomes a Muslim. [Khalid Latif Gauba, *The Prophet of the Desert*, p. 33]

The Kalima, coined by Khadija, reads: *La Ilaha-ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur-Rasul-Allah*. It means: There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. [Verse 37:125 of the Quran contradicts this cardinal belief of Muslims. By quoting in it Prophet Elias, who had supposedly asked his people, "Will ye

call upon Baal [a Pagan god] and forsake the best of Creators," Allah agreed that there were other gods besides Him, but He was the best among them. This totally destroys the mono-theistic doctrine on which Islam was founded.]

Curiously, Muhammad never became a Muslim by invoking Kalima Tayyaba. He thus preached the Oneness of Allah while remaining and ultimately dying a Pagan. [Q 42:52. It says that Muhammad had previously known nothing about revelations or the true Faith (Islam), meaning he grew up as a Pagan] Waraqa ibn Nofal, Khadija's aged cousin, also played his prearranged role. Using his scholarly authority, he declared not only that his surrogate's claims were true but that he was the very prophet whose impending arrival other religious scriptures had foretold, thereby greatly aiding his success. His support of Muhammad notwithstanding, Waraqa never accepted Islam and died a Christian.

Following Khadija, other converts to Islam were:

– Ali ibn Abu Talib, a 10-year old cousin of Muhammad who lived under his care and who later married his daughter Fatima. Ali would over time become a centerpiece of the Shia version of Islam.

– Zaid ibn Harith, a young freed slave whom Muhammad had for some time adopted as his son. People called Muhammad "Abu Zaid," father of Zaid.

– Abdullah Atik ibn Abu Kahafa, universally known as Abu Bakr, "the father of the virgin she-camel," a title presumably given him after he let a 50-plus years old Muhammad marry his six-year-old daughter. One of Muhammad's closest friends, he would become Islam's first Caliph.

– Abdu Amr, son of Awf, a distant kinsman of Muhammad's mother, Amina.

– Abu Ubayda, son of al-Jarrah who belonged to the clan of Bani al-Harith.

As Muhammad already knew that the early stage of his mission would be perilous, he, therefore, planned to take his initial steps in secrecy. He apprehended hostility on every side: from his immediate kindred; from the Quraishites of the line of Hashim whose power and prosperity Muhammad linked not only with idolatry but greed and selfishness; [Muhammad was, perhaps, influenced by a nomad belief that the word "*Quraish*" was synonymous with shark, hence his hatred of them. The nomads' minds were fertile for the planting of any creed which would promise rewards in a future life; cf. R.V.C. Bodley, op. cit. p. 24] and still more from the rival line of Abd Shams who were ever ready to dispossess the Hashimites of the guardianship of Ka'aba, which generated much revenue for its keepers. Abu Sufian, son of Harb and a grandson of Omayya, as well as the great-grandson of Abd Shams, headed the later group. He was an able and ambitious man, said to have great wealth and influence over the people of Mecca. For Muhammad, he proved a redoubtable opponent until he was forced to convert to Islam, when Muhammad was about to take over Mecca and kill all of its Pagan inhabitants if they refused to follow Abu Sufian, and resisted Muhammad any more.

Hence Muhammad began propagating his new religion slowly and discreetly, and for the first three years, he had fewer than 40 converts, mostly young persons, strangers, and downtrodden slaves. Contrary to Muhammad's expectations, the Pagans did not turn against him; rather, they tolerated his

anti-idol campaign with great magnanimity. They took offense only when he disparaged their gods and even then they reacted mildly, a fact supported by the Quran. It never says the Pagans subjected Muhammad to any physical abuse, even after he committed a serious crime by abusing their deities.

For his followers, Muhammad introduced the three daily prayers, which he borrowed from Paganism. Fearing Pagan ridicule for his change in prayer posture that required his followers to raise their backs above their heads, he held his prayer congregations in private, at the home of a neo-Muslim or in a cave near Mecca. His precautions, however, did not protect him from the Pagans for long.

They soon discovered Muhammad's secret gatherings. At one of them, a quarrel broke out, a scuffle ensued, and Saad, one of Muslims, wounded a Pagan opponent of his faith. This feat earned him a coveted place among all Muslims, as the first to shed blood in the cause of Islam. The discovery of Muhammad's meeting place and the attention he begun to receive from the Pagans sapped his spirits and perturbed his mind. He looked worn and haggard, and abstraction replaced his normal mental sharpness. His associates noticed his altered mien and dreaded an attack of illness. Finding him in this condition, his Pagan detractors accused him of hallucinations and scoffed at his call to embrace his faith.

Abu Bakr and Othman — two converts to Islam — enjoyed strong protection from their respective clans. As a result, they never faced any violence from the Pagans, though they accompanied Muhammad on all of his preaching missions. Even the young Ali was not treated harshly, either by children of his age or by his elders, for having become a Muslim, as he too had the protection of his clan.

The small community of the Meccan Christians stayed neutral, confident that since Muhammad had married Khadija, who was closer to Christianity than Paganism, and as she wielded considerable influence over her husband, he would not harm them if he ever prevailed over the Pagans. They were absolutely right. Muhammad never appeared to them as a threat. Rather, he not only declared them to be fond of Muslims, but he also protected them by declaring them Muslims. [Q 5:85 and 5:114] The Christians also felt his opponents would give them no trouble if they defeated him, since the Christians were never a cause of concern for their Pagan neighbors.

After brooding silently over the problem his campaign faced for some time, and prodded by Khadija and Waraqa, Muhammad threw off his reserve. Displaying greater enthusiasm, he went about openly proclaiming his doctrines and presenting himself as a prophet, sent by Allah, to end idolatry from the soil of his land and to soften the rigors of the Jewish and Christian laws. The hills of Safa and Marwa, sanctified by the traditions of Hagar and Ishmael, became his preaching grounds. When the Pagan interrogations overwhelmed him, he retired to his sanctuary on the Mount of Hira, to return after preparing himself with new arguments and pronouncements, which he always tried to pass off as "revelations" from Allah.

Unimpressed, the Pagans continued to mock him for assuming an apostolic character. Those who had seen him as a boy about the streets of Mecca and later occupied in all the ordinary chores of life, felt greatly hurt by his insulting remarks about their ancestral religion as well as their intellect, which he considered inferior to his own. They also resented

his insolence toward the top stratum in the Meccan society, which he deemed his enemy. Furthermore, he belittled them by claiming that only he knew all that existed in heaven. Ultimately, he infused Mecca with an atmosphere of enmity, which separated son from parents, brother from siblings. As if unsatisfied with the havoc he was already wreaking on their blood relationships, he deprived many of their livelihoods as well, since the turmoil discouraged people from visiting Mecca on trade or pilgrimage.

Despite the fact that Muhammad had torn apart the fabric of their social and religious lives, the Pagans apparently never caused him bodily harm. One form of retaliation they did occasionally use was the sneer. Seeing him pass by, they would exclaim, "Behold! The grandson of Abd al Mutallib who pretends to know what is going on in heaven!" Some who had witnessed or heard about his fits called him insane; a few others declared that he was possessed by a devil, and still others accused him of sorcery. On one occasion, some Pagans are reported to have thrown a bundle of dirt on his body, which caused him no bodily injury or pain. But even when these methods failed to keep him from insulting their gods and religion, the Pagans did not turn violent against him; instead, they commissioned a poet to lampoon him and his doctrines.

This poet was none other than the youthful Amru ibn al-Aass. As we have mentioned earlier, his mother was a prostitute who plied her trade in Mecca. She was a very beautiful woman whose paramours included all the city's nobles from the tribe of Quraish. When she gave birth to Amru, all of her lovers laid equal claim to his paternity. As the

newborn most resembled Aass, he received the patronymic *ibn al-Aass*, son of Aass.

Nature was very kind to the young man. Indeed, he had all the qualities of a genius. At an early age, he became one of the most popular poets of Arabia. People praised him for the pungency of his satires, which he delivered with a captivating sweetness. He delighted listeners and they paid close attention to his lines.

Pitted against Muhammad and his proselytizing, Amru responded with sharp-edged pasquinades and humorous madrigals. Because his compositions were so clever, people circulated them widely and carried them to distant places. Their reaction proved a temporary setback for Muhammad, but in the end even Amru's wit failed to stop him from carrying out his campaigns.

Those Pagans with some neutrality demanded that Muhammad produce supernatural proofs to back up his claims. His reply, evidenced in the Quran, was evasive to the point of comedy. Since the Quran, he said, was a miracle in itself, [Cf. Q 29:51] he did not need to perform any other feat to prove his claim to be a Prophet of Allah. In essence, he said: My words are my miracle!

Unsatisfied, the Pagans demanded miracles addressed to the senses. For instance, he should cause the deaf to hear, the blind to see, or the dead to rise. Muhammad, typically, sidestepped this demand by saying that Allah had stopped performing miracles, as the people of the past had not believed them [Q 17:59] — though one must assume these skeptics would have believed their own eyes, had he performed a miracle. Then he denounced them for questioning his utterances and threatened them with dire consequences from

Allah if they kept insisting on miracles. On this score, Muhammad fared worse than Yusuf (Joseph) — an Allah-fearing man, but neither a prophet nor an apostle — who cured his father's blind eyes just by having his shirt cast over them. [Q 12:93] Why Muhammad could never do anything similar is beyond our comprehension!

Al Maalem, an Arabian writer, observed that some of Muhammad's disciples once joined the Pagans in demanding miracles, [Cf. Q 29:50] and urged him to prove the divinity of his mission by turning the hill of Safa into gold. In response, Muhammad took to prayer, and then assured both his followers and opponents that the angel Gabriel had appeared and informed him that, should Allah work the desired miracle, all those who disbelieved would be exterminated. For the sake of the multitude, he implored Allah not to cause the miracle, thus permitting the hill of Safa to retain its pristine, non-valuable state. He continued to insist that the Quran was his miracle and that he had no power to perform additional ones to dissipate their incredulity.

Before the Pagans could ask him further questions, Allah stepped in, and told them that they would not be able to pin the Prophet and Him down, as He was the best of Deceivers and that He sent miracles in the past to terrorize the people, but as they "treated them as false," He stopped sending them a long time ago!

Muhammad Channels Satan

We have reached the fifth year of Muhammad's mission. From time to time, he faced Pagan opposition to his preaching, but it never completely stopped him. Though he enjoyed near-complete freedom to proselytize, it seems he had gained no more than 50 or 60 converts over this long period.

At this stage, we wish to digress and visualize the stressful days Muhammad must have been passing through, after pursuing his mission for five devastating years, in the religiously charged atmosphere of Mecca.

As noted earlier, it was Khadija, along with her cousin who commissioned Muhammad to found a religion in Mecca that would establish the unity of Allah. He had undertaken the mission not only for his wife's sake, but for his own reasons, which we have stated earlier, after she assured him that she would put her entire wealth at his disposal to spend as he deemed worthy of the cause.

Muhammad lived on his wife's wealth for five years. He also fed most of the new Muslims, many of them slaves and the downtrodden. In addition, he had to use much of her wealth as bribes for the Pagans who were inclined towards Islam, but refrained from converting to it. Yet he had taken no part in trade for a long time, and when he had almost exhausted his resources, he began to feel the financial pressure. He therefore began to search for ways to reduce the drain on his dwindling coffers.

To understand what Muhammad might have been contemplating at this time to ease the strain on his budget, we need to consider conditions then prevailing in the Arabian society. Muhammad had initially launched his movement to force the Pagans to worship a lone Allah. He next attacked the rich merchants of Mecca because they took pride in their wealth and refused to share their privileges with the poor, orphaned, and the needy. Though the latter issue had won him some support from the common folks, he must have seen its crippling economic effect on the lives of the very people he had intended to help. To ease their difficulties and to continue

to enjoy their support, Muhammad found himself forced to come up with some conciliatory policies that would help him achieve both the goals.

The first such policy he came up with was aimed at appeasing his opponents. Not fully realizing the implications of his act, he announced that he accepted the divinity of the "Lord of the House," whom the Pagans worshipped in the form of a statue, which they had installed in the Ka'aba. Muhammad's statement that he was "commanded to serve the Lord of this City," [Cf. Q 27:91] an allusion to Allah of Mecca, supports our contention. He then permitted his followers to worship the idols of *al-Lat*, *al-Uzza,* and *al-Manat*. To Muslims, this second concession to the Pagans is known as *"Gharaniq."* According to one Muslim writer, Muhammad announced it in Mecca late in the fifth or early in the sixth year of his preaching. [Majid Khan, *'The Holy Verses'*, pp 32-37]

The Pagans were elated, thinking that their days of polemics and economic hardship were over. But their happiness did not last long. Muhammad soon withdrew the latter concession when he realized that by authorizing Muslims and the Pagans to worship the idols, he had retracted his stand on absolute monotheism and jeopardized his prophethood. To salvage himself, he blamed Satan and claimed that he had put the words of concession in his mouth, even though he had Allah's full and constant protection against the devil's influence. His retraction of the concession infuriated the Pagans.

Deeming it to be an act of betrayal, they resolved to oppose his religion more vigorously. Had Muhammad not enjoyed his Uncle Abu Talib's protection, they might have caused him bodily harm. Despite this fiasco and the atmosphere of distrust

it created, we must praise Muhammad's practicality, which he exhibited in all of his difficult times. He never took responsibility for any of his mistakes and failures. His practicality and the ability to blame others for his mistakes and failures played a major role in making him, over the long run, a hugely successful man and the ruler of his land.

The Abyssinian Adventure

Muhammad's record after five years in Mecca was dismal. Pagan opposition to him and his religion was growing as his resources shrank alarmingly, with no perceptible source of replenishment. Abu Talib's protection had shielded him from his opponents, but it did not extend to many of his followers, and he saw many suffer torture at the hands of their Pagan masters. Moreover, he had failed to provide gainful employment to those who had forsaken their jobs and become his disciples. Consequently, he sensed a suppressed disaffection taking hold of his followers. He realized he needed to invigorate his followers' faith in his leadership and divert his opponents' hostility away from him and his religion through a new move.

With these objectives in mind, Muhammad earnestly began to explore all possibilities to help him stabilize his position. In the process, he learned a lot about Abyssinia [Ethiopia]. He found that a Christian king ruled it, one tolerant of other religions. He also discovered that the Negus, or king, harbored ambitions about Mecca, since he did not want to see the Persians spread their net of influence over this citadel of Pagan worship.

In the final analysis, Abyssinia appeared to Muhammad to be a perfect country to seek help from. Therefore, he sent a delegation of neo-Muslims to its king in 615 A.D. It consisted

of eleven members, including Ruqayyah, his daughter. Her husband, Othman ibn Affan, was its leader.

We assume that Muhammad had sent the delegation with the following ends in mind:

1. Conquest: Muhammad knew the Abyssinians were eager to regain their lost dominion of Arabia, as well as to help their Byzantine allies who had just suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the Persians. As a result, they were willing to listen to any suggestions for diverting the Persians' attention from their future conquests. Hence, the delegation was to convince the Negus to attack defenseless Mecca and take over its administration before the Persians could lay their hands on it. Other members had instructions to narrate horrible stories in the Negus' court of how their Pagan masters were torturing them and starving them to death. Should the Negus invade and conquer Mecca, he was to choose Muhammad as its ruler. Once in power, Muhammad could achieve his other aims easily and relatively quickly.

2. Haven: Should the Negus refuse to invade Mecca, the leader and his wife were to return home, but the rest of the delegation was to stay behind in Abyssinia. These "refugees" would find jobs among a people tolerant of other religions. This scheme had a two-fold purpose: To keep the delegation members, though small, beyond the reach of their masters, and to free Muhammad from the important responsibility of providing for their livelihood.

3. Business development: Those delegation members with some mercantile background were to explore the possibility of forging aggressive business connections with the Abyssinians, which might ultimately undermine the trade monopoly of the Pagan niggards.

4. Platform: The presence in Abyssinia of his followers would create a base for Muhammad himself. Should he ever feel threatened in Mecca, he could easily go over to Abyssinia and live safely among them. From there, he could plot and plan to conquer Mecca himself.

The Meccans suspected Muhammad's purpose in sending his followers to Abyssinia. As a result, they followed his mission with one of their own, charged with countering the Muslims' allegations and having the Negus expel them from his country. The Negus heard both the parties, and declined Muslims' request to invade Mecca, but allowed them to live in his country. The Pagans were happy with his first decision, though not with the second.

Most Muslim writers maintain that these early Muslims migrated to Abyssinia solely to escape the persecution of their enemies. This analysis is only partly true. In support of our hypothesis, we submit: At this time, no police or law enforcement agencies existed anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula. But the lack of those agencies did not mean anarchy. The nomads and the sedentary Arabs had rules to govern all aspects of their lives, and to regulate their social and tribal conduct.

Over a long period of time, the Arabs developed a system of protection, which a tribe or clan gave to its members. Without protection, one could not survive in Mecca as well as in the desert of the Peninsula. This system of protection made it dangerous for a man to lay his hands on a member of another tribe or clan. If any member of one clan attacked a member of another, the victim's clan exacted vengeance or a blood-writ from the clan of the offender. This system worked well for the Arabs, helping them to keep violent deaths under

control. Abu Talib had made use of it to safeguard Muhammad from the physical assault of the Pagans. When his uncle died, Muhammad had to obtain the protection of Mutim ibn Adi, the chief of the Nofal clan of Quraish, to continue living in Mecca. Again, without it, Muhammad would have found it very difficult to live and survive in the city of his birth.

Othman ibn Affan, who headed the delegation to Abyssinia, enjoyed the full protection of his clan. As a result, his enemies never manhandled or assaulted him after he became a Muslim. Moreover, it is claimed that he had an independent income to support himself and his family. Since he faced no threat to his life and had a secure source of revenue, the reasons that induced him and his wife to migrate to Abyssinia are not hard to understand: His Prophet father-in-law chose him to represent him before the Negus, thus helping him achieve in time those vital objectives mentioned above.

The Conversion of Omar

In Mecca, meanwhile, Muhammad continued propagating his faith and trying to win converts. The Pagans took peaceful steps to deter him, but failed. Frustrated, they passed a decree banishing him, and all those who embraced his faith, from the streets of Mecca.

Sensing the ferocity of the impending storm, Muhammad took refuge in the house of a disciple named Orkham, on the hill of Safa. This hill was renowned in Arabian tradition as the place where Adam and his wife (the Quranic reference to Eve, whom it never names) lived together, after their reunion on the plains of Arafat following their expulsion from the Garden or heaven (how they traveled down through the sky to our

planet remains a mystery) and their long, solitary wanderings about the earth. Tradition, likewise, connected Safa with the story of Hagar, Abraham's concubine, and her illegitimate son Ishmael.

Muhammad remained in his sanctuary for a month, receiving new revelations from Allah and trying to attract new converts to Islam. Eventually, the Quraishites learned of his whereabouts.

Muhammad had an uncle named Amru ibn Hashim. The Quraishites called him Abu Ihoem, or Father of Wisdom, on account of his sagacity. However, Muslims referred to him as Abu Jahl, Father of Folly, due to his opposition to his nephew and Islam. The later appellation continues to haunt him even after his death over 1400 years ago, as zealous Muslims seldom mention him without the ejaculation "May he be accursed of Allah!"

This uncle sought Muhammad out, heaped vituperation on him, and reportedly even tried to physically mistreat him. Hamza, another uncle of Muhammad, heard of the outrage as he was returning from a hunting trip. Though not then a Muslim, he was pledge-bound to protect his nephew.

Hamza marched with his bow in his hand to the place where Abu Jahl was boasting of his recent triumph to some Quraishites, and dealt him a blow that inflicted a serious wound to his head. An altercation followed the attack, whereupon Hamza declared that he had just then become a Muslim. He at once took the oath of adherence to Muhammad, thus greatly boosting the morale and the mission of his marginalized nephew.

His prestige and self-esteem injured, Abu Jahl vowed vengeance. He had a 26-year-old nephew named Omar ibn al

Khattab, a man of gigantic stature, possessing prodigious strength and great courage. Omar was reportedly so tall that even when seated, he dwarfed those standing. Reputedly a heavy drinker, he was also known to beat his wife habitually. Instigated by his uncle Abu Jahl, this daunting man pledged to penetrate Muhammad's hideout and harm him or Hamza or both in revenge.

On his way to Orkham's house, where both Hamza and Muhammad were lodged, Omar met a Quraishite to whom he disclosed his design. The Quraishite was a secret convert to Islam and sought to turn him away from his violent errand. He told him to see if anyone from his own family were guilty of heresy before he rushed to harm Muhammad or his uncle. Taken aback, Omar asked who among his family members had renounced his ancestral religion. The informant gave him the names of his sister Amina and her husband Said.

Omar changed his course and hastened to his sister's dwelling. Entering it abruptly, it is said he found his sister and her husband reading the Quran. Said attempted to hide it, but his confusion convinced Omar of the truth of the accusation and heightened his fury. He struck Said to the ground, placed his foot on his chest, and would have plunged his sword into his heart had his sister not intervened. In his rage, he gave her a blow, which bathed her face in blood. "Enemy of Allah!" sobbed Amina, "dost thou strike me thus for believing in the only true Allah? In spite of thee and thy violence, I will preserve the true faith." She added with fervor, "Yes, there is no Allah but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet. And now, Omar, finish thy work!"

Omar paused and took his foot off Said's chest. "Show me the writing," he said.

When she gave him the parchment containing the twentieth Sura of the Quran, he read it and it sank into his heart. Moved greatly, especially by the parts on resurrection and judgment, he decided to embrace Islam without further delay. [Omar, his sister and her husband, it appears, were among "few of the Arabs" who could read. See Martin Lings' *"Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources"*, p. 23]

Omar rushed to Orkham's house to tell Muhammad that he wanted to become a Muslim. Muhammad greeted him warmly and led him in the Muslim profession of faith, the *Kalima Tayyaba*, the recitation of which completes one's induction into Islam.

Omar was not content until his conversion was publicly announced. At his request, Muhammad accompanied him at once to the Ka'aba, to perform there the rites of Islam openly. Omar walked by his left side and Hamza by the right to protect him from injury or insult. It is said that some 40 disciples accompanied them in a procession.

The story about Amina and Said reading the Quran from a parchment is a latter-day concoction. In fact, at this time the Arabs did not know about parchment, or papyrus, though the Egyptians had long used it for their writings.

Muslims received the encouragement to fabricate the parchment story from two verses of the Quran. [Q 6:7, 52:2-3] In one [Q 6:7], Muhammad hypothesizes that even if he had written the entire Quran on a parchment, which the Pagans could see and touch, even then they would have denied its divine nature and rejected it as *"nothing but the obvious magic."* In the other [Q 52:2-3], Muhammad alluded to the *"Scriptures penned down on unrolled parchment."*

Unable to substantiate both statements, one Muslim scholar of repute tried to explain them by asserting:

"Qirtas," in the Apostle's life, could only mean "parchment," which was commonly used as writing material in Western Asia from the 2nd century B.C. The word was derived from the Greek, Charles (cf. Latin, "Charla"). Paper, as we know it, made from rags, was used by the Arabs after the conquest of Samarqand in 751 A.D. The Chinese had used it by the 2nd century B.C. The Arabs introduced it into Europe; it was used in Greece in the 11th and 12th century, and in Spain through Sicily in the 12th century. The Papyrus, made from an Egyptian reed, was used in Egypt as early as 2,500 B.C. It gave place to paper in Egypt in the 10th century. [Abdullah Yusuf Ali. *Op. cit*., vol.1, p. 290]

Because we highly esteem the scholar's erudition, we wish that, instead of giving us the paper's history, he would have explained how the Arabs might have possessed parchment when they lacked the papyrus reed, and why they would reportedly write Allah's revelations on skin, leaves, and bones if this useful material were available to them!

The truth, perhaps, lies elsewhere. We suspect that Muhammad had seen parchment in Syria on his business trips, and, impressed by its usefulness, mentioned it in passing to the Pagans. Or perhaps, the compilers of the Quran simply inserted "parchment" in the verses when giving it final shape in 933 A.D.

Or possibly "parchment" entered the Quran in the following manner: Damascus was a city with a highly literate populace when Abu Bakr conquered it in 634 A.D. Some believe the Syrians were among the first inventors of the Arabic alphabet. The narrator of the verse must have visited Damascus and seen parchment in use there. While narrating to

the scribe what Muhammad supposedly had told his disciples about the Pagans' attitude towards his revelations, they may well have added "parchment" to the verse without realizing that it was not in use among the Pagans of Mecca, when Muhammad was preaching Islam there from 610 to 622 A.D.

Hamza and Omar's dual conversion proved a milestone in the early history of Islam, for now Muhammad had the physical and moral support of two of the Quraishites' bravest and most powerful men. As a result, he could go about preaching his doctrines more confidently than ever before. Indeed, Omar's conversion is said to have so exasperated the Quraish that Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle, concluded that the Pagans might make an attempt on his nephew's life, by deception or open violence. Therefore, the old man urged him and some of his disciples to withdraw to a house he owned in a neighborhood of the city.

The protection given to Muhammad and his followers by Abu Talib, the head of the Hashimites, and by others of his line although differing from him in faith, drew down on them the wrath of the rival branches of the Quraishites. The result was a schism that enmeshed the entire tribe. Abu Sufian, the head of one of the opposing branches, used Muhammad's heresies to throw discredit not merely on his kindred who had embraced his faith, but on the whole line of Hashim who — though dissenting from his doctrines— had protected him through mere clannish sentiment. Abu Sufian opposed Muhammad and Abu Talib not just out of personal hatred or religious scruples, but also because of a family feud related to the guardianship of the Ka'aba.

Clampdown

The custodianship of the Ka'aba, which generated life-supporting revenues for its custodians and others affiliated with its functions, had long rested in the hands of the Hashimite clan. Abu Talib wanted to transfer the honor of guardianship to his own line, dismaying Abu Sufian and others who sought it for themselves. Hence Abu Sufian and his adherents seized on Abu Talib's grant of a safe haven to Muhammad as a pretext for imposing a general ban on the rival line. They issued a decree forbidding the rest of the Quraish from intermarrying or having any dealings, even commercial ones, with the Hashimites until they delivered up their kinsman Muhammad, so that they could prevent him through non-violent means from blaspheming their ancestral religion. They wrote this decree on a rag and hung it up on the wall of Ka'aba in the seventh year of what is called the mission of the Prophet.

Muslims claim that the ban caused great difficulty to Muhammad and his followers. However, we do not know how the proclaimers of the decree could have implemented it, since Allah remained ever ready to protect him from his enemies, and thwart their overt and covert plans!

The short period of Muhammad's banishment rolled into the annual hajj season, when pilgrims flocked to Mecca from all parts of Arabia to fulfill their religious obligations. During this sacred occasion, according to ancient law and usage among the Arabs, all hostilities ceased and warring tribes met in temporary peace to worship at Ka'aba. Utilizing this truce, Muhammad and his disciples ventured out of their shelter and returned to the life of Mecca.

While at large, Muhammad made full use of the opportunity that the Pagan religious immunity afforded him. He mingled freely with pilgrims, preaching, praying, propounding his doctrines, and proclaiming his revelations. He made many converts who, on their return home, carried the seeds of the new faith to where they lived. The Meccan Pagans did not interfere with Muhammad, feeling bound by the sanctity of their tradition.

Muhammad, on the other hand, exploited their piety and violated the truce they expected him to honor as well. Instead, he went about conspicuously propagating his creed among the visitors who, it seems, appeared unaware of the volatile religious situation in Mecca. At the end of the pilgrimage season, Muhammad and his followers returned to their safe haven. The Pagans are not known to have done anything either to prevent their return or cause them harm. On the contrary, it seems the Pagans remained engaged with him for a time in endless arguments, which he followed with new revelations that denounced those who opposed him and his religion. Though the Quran contains, in Muhammad's own words, the details of all events that had unfolded over his 23-year apostolic mission, it gives us no indication that his opponents ever persecuted him in the real sense of the word. Nor does it, for obvious reasons, tell us clearly how Muhammad must have treated his foes, especially in a situation where Medinese Jews are reported to have vehemently opposed him and the spread of his religion among the people of their city.

Because authors after Muhammad's death tailored the history of this time to favor Muslims, it is now impossible for us to know precisely the beliefs of the idolaters. Nevertheless,

the crudity of their statuary did not necessarily mean that they worshipped stones or trees, any more than Christians worship plaster figures or painted canvases of the saints. In fact, the Quran confirms that the Pagans saw the idols as merely symbolic, just as Muslims consider the Kaba a symbolic House of Allah, even when they admit that He does not and cannot confine Himself to any structure on earth.

Muhammad and some of his followers took refuge in Abu Talib's safe haven for three years. During this period, he must have remained the target of his foes' opprobrious language, but even so, it seems he continued to walk about the streets, recite his revelations, and argue in the public square, without ever fearing for his life. In the meantime, the rag with the ban on Muslims became partly destroyed and nothing of the decree remained except the initial words "In thy name, Oh Almighty Allah," the ancient formula with which the Pagans are said to have customarily begun their writing. In the circumstances, the decree was deemed annulled, whereupon Muhammad and his band of disciples returned to Mecca, unopposed and unhurt.

Pious Muslims consider the mysterious destruction of the decree to be a miracle, wrought by Allah to help Muhammad against his enemies, though Allah Himself admitted in the Quran that He had stopped performing miracles a long time ago before He appointed Muhammad as a prophet. [Q17:59.]

Unbelievers, on the other hand, contend that mortal hands secretly defaced the document, which had become embarrassing to Abu Sufian due to its ineffectiveness. To us, even the Unbelievers' claim makes little sense, since the Pagans of the time could not have produced such a written document. More likely, they created a sign that referred to a

ban and posted it on the wall of Ka'aba. Later, they simply erased it by hand.

In any event, Muhammad returned to Mecca at about the same time the Persians overwhelmed the Byzantines and conquered Syria and part of Egypt. The idolatrous Quraishites exulted in the defeat of the Christian Byzantines who opposed the worship of idols and associated Christianity with the new faith of Islam. Muhammad, on the other hand, was disheartened by the Byzantines' defeat, but replied to the Pagans' taunts and exultation by producing the thirtieth Sura, which opened with these words: "*The Roman Empire has been defeated – in a land close by; but they (even) after, (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious – within a few years*." [Q 30:2-3]

The Pagans verified the prediction and found it to be true. Muslim theologians cite it as a proof that the Quran came down from Allah and that Muhammad possessed the gift of prophecy. In reality, the whole forecast was probably a shrewd guess by Muhammad about the long back-and-forth war between Persia and the Byzantine (or "Roman") Empire, aided by the knowledge of the actual events occurring around the Arabian Peninsula. Politicians of our time make similar predictions almost daily, and hence any attribution of Muhammad's feat to heavenly intervention asperses his political acumen and farsightedness. His vagueness is also a problem, for if he had been specific beyond the level of possible guesswork, the prophecy claim would be more credible. We have to wonder why Allah didn't provide more details and help him vanquish the doubters!

Not long after Muhammad returned to the free Meccan life, the aged Abu Talib found himself facing death. Though this uncle had supported and protected Muhammad all along from

his enemies, he had not converted himself to his nephew's new faith. Muhammad often implored him to accept Islam and die as a Muslim, but Abu Talib always put him off. He pleaded that he could neither give up his ancestral religion, nor join in his adherents' practice of placing their "backsides above their heads," as the old man described his nephew's prostration at prayer three times a day. Muhammad approached Abu Talib once again on his deathbed and beseeched him one last time to accept Islam. He declined and breathed his last as an infidel. Abu Lahab, his brother, succeeded him as the head of the clan of Bani Hashim.

A few days later, Khadija, Muhammad's faithful wife and dedicated banker, also took her leave from this world. The year was 619 A.D., and she was 65. Though Khadija was much older than Muhammad and past her womanly bloom in the East, and though he had an amorous temperament, he is said to have remained completely faithful to her and never taken another wife, though Arabian laws allowed him to do so. Pious Muslims point to this fact, while highlighting his virtues. But objective analysis of his relationship with Khadija does not support the claim of virtue here.

It is true that so long as Khadija had lived, Muhammad took no additional wives, but it was not purely out of his love for her. It was, rather, dictated by his circumstances. He was fearful of his wife and avoided actions that might annoy her. He must have realized that if he took another wife, while Khadija was still alive, she might have reacted by depriving him of his livelihood. She might even have divulged the secrets about his prophethood and divine mission, thereby destroying him and his dream. Muhammad's conduct after Khadija's death lends credence to our hypothesis: No record

tells us that he had felt deep grief over his wife's death, or that he ever mourned it in the manner of a truly bereaved husband. Since Muhammad was mainly interested in her wealth, he did not permit her to take active part in his preaching activities, which is why we find almost no Hadiths emanating from her, a fact that the Muslim scholars have successfully kept hidden from Muslims as well as from the non-Muslim students of the Islamic history.

Soon after, Muhammad sought to compensate himself by entering into multiple wedlocks. By his own law, he permitted four wives to each of his followers. Yet he did not limit himself to four, reasoning that the rules for ordinary mortals did not apply to a prophet gifted with enormous manly prowess and special privileges. Of his numerous marriages and wives, we shall speak later.

Rebuff at Taif

Muhammad quickly realized that the death of Abu Talib was an irreparable loss. He then had no one left who could check the hostility of his inveterate foes Abu Sufian and Abu Jahl, and they soon allegedly stirred up such a spirit of opposition that he deemed life in his home town totally uncongenial. He also faced financial crisis, for in the meantime, he had spent all of Khadija's wealth.

Therefore, Muhammad decided to seek refuge and financial help in Taif, a small walled town some 70 miles from Mecca, inhabited by the Arabs of the Thaqif tribe. It was one of the favored places of Arabia, situated among vineyards and gardens. Here grew peaches and plums, melons and pomegranates, blue and green figs, and palm trees with their clusters of green and golden fruit. So fresh were its pastures and fruitful its fields, compared to the sterile deserts in and

around Mecca, that the Arabs believed it was a part of Syria that had broken off in Noah's deluge and floated to its present site.

Muhammad entered Taif along with his freed slave and adopted son Zaid, hoping to gain the protection of its dominant tribe or a clan on account of the influence which his uncle al-Abbas supposedly enjoyed by virtue of his possessions there. But his hope failed him badly, as Taif was a stronghold of idolatry and its inhabitants worshipped *al-Lat* in full force, believing this deity was one of Allah's three daughters. As a result, its people rejected Muhammad's preaching on the Oneness of Allah, and their tribal and clan chiefs refused to give him protection and financial help.

Despite the setback, he remained in Taif for about a month, vainly striving to convert some of its inhabitants to Islam and win monetary aid from them. But when he tried to preach his doctrines, ribald remarks drowned out his voice. On many occasions, residents threw stones at him, which the faithful Zaid warded off. Soon the popular fury became so violent as to force him out of the city. Not satisfied with his withdrawal, an insulting rabble of slaves even pursued him for some distance. Surprisingly, Allah gave Muhammad no revelation forewarning him of the hostility that awaited in Taif, nor did He rescue him from attacks in this angry city.

The visit to Taif may have proved disastrous for Muhammad's immediate mission, yet the sight of the city also immensely benefited him. It enabled him to conceive the layout of the celestial Gardens and to describe it vividly in the Quran, filled with the delights he saw there. He also peopled the Gardens with black-eyed virgin Hurs, consorts for Muslims, who entered it after Allah's judgment on the Day of

Resurrection. This licentious temptation induced many Pagans to embrace Islam, despite their initial opposition to it. Yet, at the time, driven away so ignominiously from his hoped-for refuge, Muhammad dared not return to Mecca, fearing persecution at the hands of his enemies. He, therefore, decided to remain in the desert until Zaid found him asylum with his friends in Mecca. In this extremity, Muhammad had one of those visions which always seemed to appear in his lonely and agitated moments.

He halted in a solitary place in the valley of Nakhla, between Mecca and Taif. Here, a passing group of spirits, known as Jinns to the Arabs, overheard him reading verses from his compositions to ward off his loneliness. These spirits are beings supposedly made of fire. Some are good, others evil, and all are liable to judgment on Doomsday along with the humans. They are invisible. They maintain residences at isolated places as well as near human habitations. They have wives and produce children. They also have apostles like those mankind had had from Adam to the time of Muhammad. The pious Jinns shall be, or might already have been, admitted into the Gardens of Bliss to enjoy their felicities on par with their human counterparts, while the evil ones shall be, or might already have been, consigned to fire of Hell to burn forever. How Jinns made of fire will burn in the Hell is not mentioned in the Quran!

The passing Jinns paused and listened to Muhammad reading. “Verily,” they said when he finished, “we have really heard a wonderful recital. It gives guidance to the Right, and we have believed therein: We shall not join (in worship) and (gods) with our Lord.” Their instant and spontaneous conversion to Islam consoled Muhammad, proving that

though men might ridicule him and his doctrines, the spiritual intelligence held them in high reverence. At least, we may infer as much about the Jinns from the 46th and 72nd Suras of the Quran! [Abdullah Yusuf Ali thinks they were not Jinns. According to him, they were some unfamiliar class of men or beings. See his note to verse 48:29; op. cit. vol. 2, p. 1375]

The Jinns heard the Quran for the first time, as their apostles had received no revelations like those its contains from Allah to lead them to His righteous path. The Jinns' commitment not to join in worshipping gods with their Lord proves an important fact: They, like the Pagans, were polytheists and their apostles had failed to bring them to the worship of Allah, thus demonstrating that His very creations — men and Jinns — had always won against Him, until He began to kill them with His own hands in the time of Muhammad.

Inspired by the conversion of the Pagan Jinns, Muhammad promptly declared himself to be the one sent by Allah to earth to convert them, as well as the human race, to Islam. Interestingly, science has found not a wisp of evidence for Jinns, human logic does not support them, and people elsewhere have never noticed them. Yet belief in their existence is one of the major precepts of Islam!

The Night of the Seven Heavens

Through the good offices of his freed slave Zaid, Muhammad received the protection of Mutim ibn Idi, chief of the Nofal clan of the Quraish, and returned one evening to Mecca. The next day, Mutim with his sons and nephews went fully armed to the public square of the Ka'aba and announced that Muhammad was henceforth under their protection. He was delighted, but it seems that at this crucial juncture of his

mission, he refrained from preaching and persuasively converting the Quraish Pagans to his faith. Instead, he used his time and energy to try to convert those tribesmen who visited Mecca from time to time, as well as those nomads whom he could reach without being impeded by his enemies.

During this period, it is said, Muhammad, for an unexplained reason, was sleeping one night of the year 620 A.D., in the house of his cousin Umm Hani. She was a widow whose husband had died when the couple was living in Abyssinia. In the dead of the night, angel Gabriel came to him and "spurred him with his foot." [Martin Lings, *op. cit*. p. 101] He woke up and the "winged horse with a woman's face and peacock's tail," called the Burraq, instantly transported him to Jerusalem. Here, Muhammad tied the Burraq to a post and then led all the prophets of the bygone days, including Adam, in a prayer at the holy temple called the "Dome of the Rock." Whether or not he had recited Suras from the Quran in the prayer is not known. Some Muslim commentators, however, say that the temple in question remained in ruins from the 40th year of Christ's ascension to the Garden till the time of Caliph Omar (634-44), who restored it to its original shape. How Omar was able to retrieve the original design of the edifice, however, remains to us an enigma.

Taking into cognizance Muhammad's alleged ascension to heaven and his physical contact with Allah, some critics question the purpose of his presence, in the dead of night, in the house of a lone, widowed woman, as well as Allah's decision to invite him to His Garden in the seventh sky from her house, instead of his own, which he had inherited from his deceased wife Khadija. They have found no reasonable answer, and the question intrigues them even today We

believe that Muhammad invented the story of the trip to Allah's Garden to hide his presence in Umm Hani's house. The Meccan polytheists honored their recently dead by refraining, for some time, from acts that would distress the departed souls. Illicit sex was one of the forbidden acts. Muhammad failed to live by that standard, and immediately after Khadija's death, he sought to satisfy his sexual needs with his widowed cousin Umm Hani. This act was doubly offensive to the Pagans, as they also considered sexual contacts between cousins a major sin.

The next morning, his followers and others wanted to know where he had been during the night. Unable to disclose the fact that he was sleeping in the house of his widowed paramour, he told them he had taken a trip to the celestial world that night. As no humans had seen him on the journey, his response effectively barred the questioners from demanding an eyewitness to prove his claim. He thus masterfully extracted himself from a quagmire which, if handled less skillfully, would have effectively destroyed his reputation and his apostolic career.

After prayer at the Dome of the Rock, angel Gabriel opened up Muhammad's heart for the second time, cleansed it of all sins that had accumulated there since the first sanitation at age five, and replaced the heart in his chest. Thereafter, a ladder was installed, connecting the site of the Dome with all the seven skies. Muhammad climbed up from one to another and saw all the seven Gardens. In addition, he saw Hell, and observed more women burning in its flames than men. *Al-Aqsa*, as Muslims also call the Dome under the influence of a Quranic verse, [Q 17:1] thus became one of the three holiest places of Islam, because, they insist, Muhammad had

corporeally ascended to the throne of Allah from its vicinity. Had he transited to the Gardens, say, from Washington, D.C., it too would have become one of their sacred places on earth, giving them the right to own and use it for the propagation of their faith.

Describing Muhammad's journey through the seven skies, one scholar writes:

"At last the wild journey stopped and Mohammed found himself within two bow shots of the throne of God. … For a while there was great silence, and nothing was heard except the whispering sound of the reed wherewith the decrees of God are inscribed on the tablets of Fate. … Muhammad did not raise his head at once. When he did, he found the face of God was covered with twenty thousand veils. [How Muhammad was able to count the veils is not known.] Even so, the glory which radiated from behind the veils was greater than fifty thousand sunrises. … As Mohammed's eyes became accustomed to the dazzling atmosphere, he saw inscribed in luminous letters on the right of God's throne: 'There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Messenger.'"

The fact that he could read the letters proves he was at least partially literate, and that Allah's claim to the contrary in the Quran is false.

The scholar continues: "Mohammed felt assured, but he found it hard to stand his ground when God stretched out His hands and placed one on his shoulder and the other on his chest. An icy chill froze his bones and his blood. Then the coldness faded and was succeeded by an ecstatic bliss which seemed to carry Mohammed out of himself into a state of mind so marvelous that it was impossible to describe. A deep voice, which was more soothing than alarming, said:

"'O Mohammed, salute thy Creator!'

"Though Muhammad did not know who had issued the command to salute his creator, his fear nonetheless disappeared. He felt complacent and was able to discuss calmly with God the details of the faith which he was to promote among the Arabs. [The other people of the earth were not on Allah's mind.] God's final injunction was that Moslems should pray fifty times a day. With these parting orders, the divine hold was relaxed, and Mohammed was whirled back to the seventh heaven, where he found Gabriel waiting," [R. V. C. Bodley; *op. cit.*, pp. 113-14] to guide him back to the earth.

Whirled back to the seventh heaven from where? Are there more than seven heavens? And have Muslims ever prayed fifty times a day? If not, why? At the urging of Moses, Muhammad negotiated the number of daily prayers with Allah, telling Him that his followers would not be able to pray fifty times a day, for if they prayed to Him so many times in a day, they would not be left with much time to attend to many essential matters of their lives. Allah realized His folly and reduced the number of daily prayers to five.

These five prayers eventually became a central part of the Islamic practice. However, the Quran, which is supposed to contain all the essential doctrines of the faith, does not specifically state that Muhammad corporeally ascended to the Gardens and spoke to Allah. This is because, some say, he withheld parts of the episode from his followers for personal reasons, [Cf. Martin Lings, *op. cit.* p. 103] thus giving the impression that the Quran, as a whole, contains only as much material as Muhammad, in his sole discretion, had chosen to divulge to his followers. This means that the Quran is not a complete book, despite claims by Allah.

While in Paradise, Muhammad saw a damsel with dark red lips. Much pleased with her, he asked her whom she belonged to before he could sleep with her. She saved herself by telling him that she was out of bounds for him as she already belonged to "Zayd b. Harith," his adopted son. [Ibn Ishaq, p. 186].

The damsel's name was Ayman whom Zaid married after she returned to the earth. She was his first wife. Later, he divroced her and married Zainab at the urging of Allah and His Prophet. How Ayman traveled from earth to Paradise and then back to the land of her future husband remains a puzzle— as indeed does her presence in Paradise before her death and without being tried by Allah on the Day of Judgment, which, according to Muslim belief has yet to come. Did she somehow also voyage up there on the Night of the Seven Skies. If so, why? Why did Allah have her in Paradise, instead of Zainab — the Prophet's cousin and his future bride? Did Allah deliberately place a temptation before Muhammad and then yank it away? The answers are opaque to us.

As for the five daily prayers, the Quran does not explicitly mention them, nor is there any hard evidence that Muhammad himself had prayed five times a day. Rather, the Quran mentions, though not clearly, three daily prayers: In the morning, evening, and night. Neither does this incomplete Book from Allah describe the specifics of prostration; all it requires of Muslims is a simple inflection, followed by prostration in their prayers. It does not require them to recite anything from the Quran during their prayers. Furthermore, the Quran does not call upon Muslims to circumcise their male offspring. Muhammad himself had never undergone this procedure, nor is he known to have had any of his own sons

circumcised. Nonetheless, Muslims carry out this practice today, not for health reasons, but to please Allah and His Prophet.

Many noted historians dispute Muhammad's physical Ascension to the seven Gardens in the skies. One is Professor Fazlur Rahman, who says that "the spiritual experiences of the Prophet were later woven by tradition, especially when an 'orthodoxy' began to take shape, into the doctrine of a single, physical, locomotive experience of the 'Ascension' of Muhammad to Heaven, and still later were supplied with all the graphic details about the animal which was ridden by the Prophet during his ascension, about his sojourn in each of the seven heavens, and his parleys with the Prophets of bygone ages from Adam up to Jesus."

Rahman failed to mention prophet Idris, who is believed to have surreptitiously entered one of the seven Gardens and taken up residence therein, thereby hoodwinking angel Gabriel, his best friend. Rahman concludes that "the doctrine of a locomotive **Miraj** or Ascension developed by the orthodox (chiefly on the pattern of the Ascension of Jesus) and backed by Hadith is no more than a historical fiction whose materials come from various sources." [*Islam*, p.14]

Rahman thus strongly implies that Muhammad did not physically ascend to the Gardens and that he, therefore, did not have an audience with Allah. Hence the question of Allah imposing five daily prayers on his followers could not have arisen! Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, a respected scholar of Islam, appears to agree with Rahman. Consequently, he mentions nothing in his work on the Quran [*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*] about the mysterious Miraj, despite the fact that Muslims consider Muhammad's putative journey to the Gardens an essential component of their faith.

Part II: The Tyrant

Muhammad in Medina

Flight in the Year One

The oasis of Yathrib, now called "*al-Medina*" or "the City of the Prophet," lies some 250 miles north of Mecca on the ancient caravan route that connected Mecca with Syria.

In olden times, Meccan Arabs traveled to this distant town to sell slaves [Q 29:67. This verse implies that men in Arabia kidnapped men and women for slavery] and whatever little products their land produced and buy commodities they needed to support their bare existence.

Yathrib differed fundamentally from Mecca. As we have stated earlier, the latter possessed, in addition of the well of Zamzam, a few shallow wells in a dry watercourse, and the water was frequently insufficient even for drinking. Enclosed by bare rocky mountains, this little settlement shimmered beneath a scorching sun. It had no vegetation, and agriculture was impossible. Since there was nothing in Mecca to live on, most of its people earned their bread by serving the pilgrims, [Cf. Q 9:28] who came to pay homage to their idol gods. Some residents had to seek livelihoods elsewhere, by trade to the Yemen, Egypt, Syria, and Persia. Mecca was the base from which all caravans set out on their long journeys, and to which they returned with precious commodities, including food-stuffs, which they procured in those distant lands.

The economy of Yathrib was entirely different. It was an oasis. An ample supply of water and a wide valley between

the mountains gave full scope to agriculture. The whole area was pleasantly verdant with crops and well-planted gardens of date-palms. The inhabitants of Yathrib lived principally on agriculture, as well as a limited number of domestic animals. The population maintained its tribal character. Each tribe owned its own region of cultivation, in the center of which it built a fortified village. The valley, therefore, appeared green and refreshing to eyes, dotted here and there with small villages, a serene scene that calmed the minds of the tired and the restless in no time.

In the 7th century, five small tribes inhabited Yathrib, and the members of each were, perhaps, quite few. Three of them— the Bani Qaynuqa, Bani Nadir, and Bani Quraiza — professed Judaism. No record exists to tell us whether these people descended from the tribe of Judah from Jerusalem or whether they were ethnic Arabs who had long ago converted to Judaism, like Jews of Yemen.

These Jews outwardly resembled Arabs and spoke Arabic like their contemporaries. Following a relatively enlightened religion, the Judaistic tribes worked as artisans in various crafts and were much richer than their Pagan neighbors. They also practiced money-lending, a business with which they are identified even today.

The Jewish tribes had schools where rabbis gave lessons on Torah and other Jewish scriptures. Presumably, all or nearly all of their men could read and write. These Jews also believed in the coming of a redeemer in the very near future. They were, thus, mentally prepared to welcome him when he appeared in their midst.

The other Yathrib tribes were the Aus and the Khazraj, who practiced the popular Paganism of Arabia. As their religion

required, they sent a selected number of worshippers every year on pilgrimage to the temple of Ka'aba.

The Aus and Khazraj tribes were generally poor. Most worked for Jews. They also borrowed from them and remained heavily indebted to them. It is said that only one set of bridal clothing and ornaments existed in the whole oasis. When a Pagan girl got married, the family had to rent finery from a Jew. Because of their wealth and superiority, Jews were not much liked by their poor Pagan debtors. Even so, most Pagans had no alternative but to remain under their influence and control. On account of their economic power, Muhammad, after dwelling among them for some time, also developed a severe dislike for them. The Quran fully describes the extent of his animosity toward Jews of this city.

Possibly in 616 A.D., a member of the Aus tribe gave his protection to a Bedouin who was visiting the oasis. In retaliation, a member of the Khazraj paid a Jew to smack the Bedouin's face. In defense of his protégé, the protector killed the Jew. The Khazrajites failed to nab the Jew's killer and instead killed a different Ausite, thus sparking a bloody feud destined to last as long as it was necessary for both the tribes to avenge the deaths. Consequently, a series of battles took place between the Aus and Khazraj tribes, culminating after a long period of time in the victory of the Aus.

Because of these circumstances, life in Yathrib was precarious, for all the warring tribes lived quite close to each other. Throughout the battles between the Aus and Khazraj, the chief of the latter, Abdullah ibn Ubayy, exhibited a peaceful temperament and moderate views. He not only refused to take part in the fratricidal strife, but used all his

efforts to end it. Of him, we shall learn more as our narrative progresses.

Far away from Yathrib, Muhammad, bereft of the financial support of his wife Khadija, found his fortunes nearing bottom. Increasingly constrained in all aspects of life, he felt especially frustrated by the slow pace of conversion among the Meccan infidels, and grew convinced that most Pagans would never accept his religion. The debacle at Taif showed him how difficult it would be for him to simply walk into another city and gain backing of its inhabitants.

He decided that his mission would be fruitless with the Meccans and ceased preaching to them. Instead, he turned his attention to the nomadic tribesmen and travelers who visited Mecca on pilgrimage or on trade. Despite his best efforts, this approach also proved unsatisfactory. He was in a predicament, and the more he thought about it, the more boxed in he felt. After much thought, he concluded that he needed to find a place whose inhabitants would receive him as an honored guest and bestow on him the privileges that would let him propagate his faith without fear or obstruction. Abyssinia, in this context, was out of question, because it was predominantly Christian. They might sympathize with him, but would not easily convert to Islam. He therefore aspired for a different territory, and bided his time.

In perhaps 620 A.D. Muhammad noticed seven or eight pilgrims arriving from Yathrib, and struck up a conversation with them. These people belonged to both the Aus and Khazraj tribes, and Muhammad's words about the Oneness of Allah and the futility of Paganism impressed them. The Khazrajites thought he was the very Messiah whom Jews of Yathrib were expecting, while the Ausites felt he might serve

as an effective mediator or peacemaker in their volatile oasis. Both, however, believed they should use the man and his abilities to further their neglected causes. They returned to Yathrib, exploring and debating all the possibilities.

The following year, a group of 12 men from Yathrib, including those of the previous year, came back to Mecca to perform their hajj. Muhammad met them in a little valley of the mountains and read them some of the verses he said he had received from Allah. All the 12 Yathribis declared themselves convinced and made a final profession of faith. [This is known as the *First Pledge of Aqaba*, or the "Pledge of Women, because it involved a promise of loyalty, but no obligation to fight; cf. Martin Lings, *op. cit*. p. 108] Since the converts were the most influential members of a powerful tribe, Muhammad sought their protection and proposed to accompany them to Yathrib. The converts informed him of the deadly feud in their city, and asked him to defer his arrival there to a time that would better suit him and his hosts. They did, however, suggest that he send a man along with them to instruct and strengthen the faith of those Yathribis who, under their influence, had converted to Islam a year ago. Muhammad agreed and sent Musab ibn Omar, one of the ablest and most learned of his disciples, to teach neo-Muslims the tenets of Islam and propagate it among others. In this way, the seed of Islam began to sprout in Yathrib and its neighborhoods.

Musab ibn Omar often faced threats to his life, yet he persisted in his preaching. His tenacity paid off and he converted some of the city's most important Pagans to Islam. Among them were Saad ibn Maad, a chief of the Ausites, and Osaid ibn Hedheir, a man of great authority.

Pagan harassment and hunger drove some Muslims out of Mecca at this time, and they took refuge in Yathrib. There, they joined Musab and helped him take the propaganda of Islam to other residents of the city. Some of its inhabitants saw their economic emancipation in Islam and embraced its doctrines for their own advancement. Thus, in just two years, these people brought a good number of the Pagans to Islam, a feat that had eluded Muhammad in 13 years of his preaching in Mecca.

In the interim, Muhammad and those who promised him sanctuary in Yathrib kept a watchful eye on the changing situation of the city. When they felt confident about giving him shelter, more than 70 of them, led by Musab ibn Omar, accompanied the hajj delegation to Mecca in the holy month of 622 A.D. for the purpose of inviting him to take up residence in their city.

To keep the matter confidential, the Yathrib emissaries arranged a midnight meeting with Muhammad in the company of his uncle al-Abbas. They met on the hill of Aqaba, where they vowed to support Muhammad upon his migration to their city. This oath is known as the second *"Pledge of Aqaba."*

Other terms of the pledge included a promise by the Yathribis to abjure idolatry and to worship the one true Allah, openly and fearlessly. To safeguard himself, Muhammad exacted unflinching obedience in weal or woe, and protection for those disciples who might accompany him. All terms decided, he committed himself to dwell in their midst and to remain with them, to be friends of their friends, and the enemy of their enemies. "But, should we perish in your cause," they

asked, “what will be our reward?” “Paradise!” Muhammad assured them. [Washington Irving; *op. cit*. p. 82]

The emissaries then placed their hands in Muhammad’s and swore to abide by the compact. He then singled out 12 persons from among them and designated them his apostles, following, we suppose, the example of Jesus Christ. But as they were swearing fealty, they heard a voice from the summit of the hill, which denounced them as apostates and threatened them with punishment. In the dark solitude of the night, the voice appeared awesome to the emissaries and they blanched. “It is the voice of the fiend Iblis,” said Muhammad scornfully. “He is the foe of Allah: Fear him not.”

In fact, it was the voice of a Quraishite spy, for the next morning the Quraish exhibited knowledge of what had transpired during the night between Muhammad and the emissaries from Yathrib, and threatened the new confederates with harsh treatment as they departed from the city. The holiness of the month kept the Quraishites from violence; otherwise, the Yathribis would likely have suffered great harm to their persons.

After the departure of the Yathribis and soon after the end of the holy month, the Pagans revived their opposition to Muhammad and his doctrines with an increased vitality. Sensing crisis at hand and already resolved to leave the city, he advised his adherents to leave Mecca and to proceed to Yathrib in order to avoid unproductive arguments and confrontation with their enemies.

They heeded his advice and departed for Yathrib. The Pagans soon discovered that the whole Muslim population of Mecca had disappeared in a short period of time, leaving its streets barren. The Yathribis, henceforth known as *Ansars* or

Helpers, received the emigrants, whom they called *Muhajirs*, with love and sympathy and shared with them all things that they owned.

Some of the Ansars even gave away their additional wives to their brethren from Mecca in order to mitigate their sexual deprivation. Later, Muhammad recognized his hosts' generous spirit and great sacrifices. To compensate them, he assured them of receiving great rewards from him as well as from Allah in this world and the world hereafter.

By the time of the Muslim exodus, Abu Sufian had become the ruler of Mecca. When the disquieting news reached him, he summoned the city elders to a meeting to decide how to tackle the situation. They recognized that it was grave and that Muslims were likely to give them serious challenges in the near future. They also realized that the fugitives would bind themselves into a strong community in Yathrib and would do anything and everything to support their lives, to the detriment of the Meccans' interests.

As a result, they concluded that Muslims, under Muhammad's leadership, would intercept their caravans, which had to pass through Yathrib to and from Syria, to plunder them and also to disrupt the trade that supported the Meccans' life. Therefore, they felt they had to take preventive measures to safeguard their caravans and their lives. Suggested strategies included sending armed Pagans to scare him off; exiling him [Q 17:76. According to Ibn Ishaq, "Mecca did not tolerate injustice and wrong within its borders and if anyone did wrong therein it expelled him." p. 47] to a distant place, other than Medina, from which he could not lead his followers; and arresting and confining him. The elders remained divided on these measures, and finally Abu Sufian

declared that the only check on the growing evil was to prevent Muhammad from leaving Mecca at any cost. To carry out the decision, they chose a representative from each Meccan tribe to confront him and, if need be, to apprehend him. This arrangement was necessary to avoid tribal vengeance if Muhammad accidentally got killed in the scuffle during his arrest. Contrary to Muslims' claim, the Quran testifies that the Pagans did not want to kill Muhammad, despite his serious offence against their religion, unless the circumstances of the confrontation made it necessary to do so. However, someone — one would hope Allah — tipped off Muhammad about the plan that Abu Sufian and his council had hatched against him. He decided to elude the Meccans with the help of his protégé Ali, before they could implement their plan.

The Pagan group arrived at the door of Muhammad's house. Through a crevice, they saw him asleep in his bed, wrapped in a mantle. They paused for a moment at the door and then rushed in to their target. The sleeper got up, but instead of Muhammad, it was Ali. Puzzled, they realized that Muhammad had fled before they could arrive. His escape enraged the Quraishites so much that they authorized a reward of 100 camels to anyone who brought him in, dead or alive.

We hear diverse tales of Muhammad's escape from his house. According to a miraculous account, Muhammad opened the door of his home silently, threw a handful of dust in the air, and blinded all his would-be captors. Then he walked unseen through their ranks and away. To the Arabs of Muhammad's time, such an act was known as sorcery, or "the intoxication of the eyes."

The learned view, however, is that he simply clambered over the rear wall of the house with the help of a slave, who lent him his back to step on. Then he ran off. Muhammad went immediately to the house of Abu Bakr to arrange their flight to Yathrib. They decided that both of them should take refuge in a cave of Mount Thor, about an hour from Mecca, and wait there until they could proceed safely to their destination. In the meantime, the children of Abu Bakr would secretly bring them food and water. Accordingly, they left Mecca while it was dark and reached the foot of Mount Thor by daybreak. Hardly had they entered the cave when they heard the sound of a pursuit. Abu Bakr quaked with fear, but Muhammad calmed him with assurance of unseen help from Allah. [Cf. Q 15:15]

Here, a miracle supposedly took place, one that is very dear to the hearts of all true believers. By the time the pursuing Quraishites reached the cavern, they believe, an acacia tree sprung up before it. In its leafy branches, a pigeon wove its nest and laid eggs. A spider spun its web over the mouth of the cave. When the pursuers saw these signs of undisturbed nature at work, they concluded that the fugitives could not have entered the cavern and headed off in another direction. Thus, Muslims say, Allah saved the lives of Muhammad and Abu Bakr from their enemies. In a like manner, they insist, Allah always saves the life of His true believers!

In reality, latter-day Muslims conjured up the so-called miracle to bolster Muhammad's credibility at the expense of his enemies. Allah could not have caused this miracle, as He stopped causing miracles long before Muhammad's time. Muhammad, who was about to emerge as a great deceiver and

a murderer, could not possibly have the divine power to cause miracles. Therefore, the story of the miracles is a fable.

The fugitives remained undiscovered in the cave for three days, while Asama, one of Abu Bakr's daughters, brought them food and water daily from her house. On the fourth day, they set out for Yathrib on camels brought to them by a servant of Abu Bakr. Their journey remained generally undisturbed till they reached Quba, about two miles from their final destination. Quba was a favorite resort for the Yathribis, and a place where they sent their infirm, for its air was pure and salubrious. On arrival here, Muhammad's camel *al-Qaswa* crouched on her knees and refused to go farther. He interpreted this act as a good omen and decided to halt there before entering Yathrib. He remained at Quba for four days, residing in the house of an Ausite named Kulthum ibn Hathem. Salman al-Parsi, the great Persian proselyte who in later years rose to power and great fame joined Muhammad here.

Salman al-Parsi was a Zoroastrian, well-versed in the doctrines of his religion. After Persia's recent victory over the Byzantines, he traveled to Yathrib. Told of Muhammad's impending arrival, he grew curious to meet him before returning to his homeland. In the first meeting, he impressed Muhammad, who asked him to stay on in Yathrib so that he could consult him on the Zoroastrian faith and its principles. Hoping to earn fame and a better living, Salman agreed, and, after converting to Islam, spent the rest of his life in this city.

While incorporating various Judaistic doctrines into Islam, Muhammad interrogated Salman to find out what his religion taught its followers so that he could insert those teachings into his new faith. Salman told him all about Zoroastrianism,

including the details of a debate that supposedly had taken place in 6th century B.C. between Zoroaster Spitama, the founder of Zoroastrianism, and King Kavi Vishtaspa who ruled Bactria, and lived in Balkh. Salman's narrative also included the interrogation of Spitama by the King and his court's wise men, priests, and magicians.

Salman narrated:

Declaring himself the Prophet of the One Wise Lord, Zoroaster asked the King to turn his heart from vain and evil idols towards the glory of the True and Wise and Eternal Lord.

"What sign have you to offer that your words are true?" the King asked.

"I teach the word of Truth against the word of Falsehood. If you or your wise men wish to question me, I shall answer and prove ways of Idol-worship to be wrong and shadowed with the darkness of night; and the way of the One Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda, to be good and bright as the light of the day," answered the Prophet Zoroaster.

"Wise men, Priests, and Magicians!" the King addressed his men, "question this stranger on his teachings, and I shall sit in judgment and decide who is right and who is wrong!"

"If you find my words to be true," said Zoroaster to the King, "promise that you will abandon the dark ways of Idol-worship and follow the shinning road of the Wise Lord."

"I promise!" said the King.

Then the debate between Zoroaster and the King's Wise Men, Priests and Magicians began.

"What is this new religion that you teach, and how is it different from the religion of your forefathers?" the Chief Priest asked Zoroaster angrily.

“I have come not to teach a new religion, but to improve the old,” Zoroaster replied.

“What I teach is the Truth of the Creator, and therefore it is good. Your Idol-worship is not true, and therefore it is evil.”

“Do you mean that our gods, the Sun, the Fire, the Mountains, and the Stars are false gods?” the Chief Priest asked.

“No,” Zoroaster replied, “they are not false gods. They are not gods at all. If a man makes a house, would you call the house the man? Even so the sun, moon, and mountains are not gods, but the works of the Creator.”

“Who is that Creator?” one of the magicians asked.

“Ahura Mazda, Lord of Wisdom, Supreme Ruler of the World!” Zoroaster replied.

“And you say that he created everything in the world?” one of the Wise Men asked.

“He created everything that is good in the world. For God is Good.”

“And who created the evil of the world?”

“Angra Manyu, the Evil Spirit, created all that is evil in the world,” replied Zoroaster.

“Then there is more than one god in the world!” the Chief Priest shouted triumphantly.

“Yes,” Zoroaster replied. “There are two Creators. In the beginning there were two Spirits: one Good and one Evil. And the Good Spirit said to the Evil Spirit, ‘Your ways are not my ways, your thoughts are not my thoughts, your words are not my words, and your deeds are not my deeds. Let us separate!’

Then the Good Spirit created all the good in the world, and the Evil Spirit made all the evil in the world."

"Then why do you say we should follow the Good Spirit? Why not follow the Evil Spirit who is just as great as the Good Spirit?" the Wise Man asked again.

"Because Good will win over Evil in the end."

"How do you know that?" a magician asked.

"Because Evil has no foresight!" Zoroaster replied slowly. "The Wise Lord remembers the past and understands the future. But the Evil spirit does not know the past nor the future. Evil lives only for the profits of the present. That is why the Wise One will win the battle over Evil in the end."

"And who created Man?" a wise men asked.

"Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, created man," Zoroaster replied.

"You said that the Good Spirit can do only good and create only good things. Then how is it that Man, created by the Good Spirit, is following the ways of the Evil Spirit?

"That is because Man was created with the free will to choose between good and evil," Zoroaster replied. "But all the thoughts a man thinks and all the words a man speaks and all the deeds a man does each day of his life are written down in the Book of Life. The good thoughts, words and deeds are written down on one side, and the bad thoughts, words and deeds are written down on the other side. When a man dies his soul comes up to the Keeper of the Book of Life. If his good thoughts, words and deeds are greater than his evil thoughts, words and deeds, then the soul goes to Heaven. Otherwise the soul must go down to the tortures of Hell."

"And will this go on forever?" the King asked.

“No, Your Majesty!” Zoroaster replied, “for the Day of Judgment is nigh. [Cf. Q 54:1. Muhammad stated the same thing in this verse] And on that Day of Days the Wise Lord will triumph over the Evil Spirits. Good will triumph over Evil. Then all dead will come to life again. The good souls and the bad souls will be tried. They will pass through a flow of molten metal. To the good it will seem like passing through warm milk. But the evil will burn everlastingly. And then the God Lord will banish the Evil Spirits and keep them there forever. And on that Day of Days the good and happy world without evil will begin and last forever!”

All the men in the throne-room were silent, for they had never heard such strange words before. And the King asked the men:

“Have you no other questions to ask this man?”

“What ought one to do to follow the ways of the Wise Lord?” asked one wise man.

“Humata, Hakkata, Hvarshta! Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds! This is the Way to the Wise Lord!”

Salman’s learned discourse recalled to Muhammad’s mind the precepts that he had learned from Waraqa ibn Nofal and monk Adas before commencing his mission. Deeply impressed, he dwelt seriously on Zoroaster’s concepts such as Free Will, Resurrection, Judgment Day, Hell and Heaven. Finding them effective tools for terrorizing the Pagans with the hazards of the afterlife, he incorporated them into what he claimed were the teachings from Allah, which He revealed to him in dream and through the angel Gabriel.

His plan yielded great results. The fear of extraordinary penalties on the Day of Judgment influenced the great

majority of the polytheists to convert to Islam. Even today, it rules the minds of Muslims who, after reading the Quran, invariably seek immediate refuge from its terrible threats in the putative almighty Allah's kindness, forgiveness, magnanimity and generosity.

It is our considered opinion that had Muhammad not terrorized the gullible Pagans with the threat of unimaginable agony in the world hereafter, he would never have achieved the success he did in his lifetime, thus sparing our planet the immense burden it is now forced to carry due to the presence of over a billion of his followers across its bosom. It is a tragedy of unimaginable magnitude for the rest of mankind.

Muslims of Mecca, who had earlier found refuge in Yathrib, heard about Muhammad's arrival at Quba and converged there to meet him. The Ansars, who had made their compact with him in the preceding year, also came forward to greet him and to renew their pledge of fidelity.

After the converts confirmed the Yathribis' favorable disposition towards him, Muhammad entered the city on Friday, September 22, in the Christian year 622. From the time Muhammad entered Yathrib, his disciples renamed it "*Medinat al Nabi*," the City of the Prophet, abbreviated to Medina. We will call it Medina henceforth. On arriving there, and to his pleasant surprise, Muhammad found himself at the head of a powerful sect, composed partly of the 70 or so Muslims, who had fled Mecca before him and partly of the city's inhabitants whom Muhammad had personally converted to his faith as well as those whom his disciples had brought under the banner of Islam. Most of the local proselytes belonged to the Aus and Khazraj tribes. They were the descendents of two brothers, al-Aus and al-Khazraj. Though the same blood

flowed through their veins, those two tribes had disrupted Medina by incessant mortal feuds until some of them voluntarily chose Islam over their ancestral religion, while others pretended to accept it to save their lives. [Ibn Ishaq, p. 239]

In a short time, Muhammad made himself the ruler of his adoptive city and achieved all other successes we credit him with today. According to a general belief, a variety of factors had helped Muhammad become the ruler of Medina. However, we are of the view that this triumph arose essentially from the unity of the two Pagan tribes, via the lures of Islam. Muhammad's political acumen also played a major role. If he had failed to bring both the tribes under the banner of his leadership, we are sure he would have found himself in the same situation he languished in for 13 years in Mecca. His failure in Medina would have strangled him and Islam forever.

Before Muhammad's flight to Medina, the Khazraj tribe lay very much under the sway of its chief Abdullah ibn Ubayy, whom we have briefly mentioned earlier. He was about to be crowned king, when Muhammad's arrival and the excitement caused by his doctrines shattered his dream. He could not become the ruler of his city. Consequently, he was badly hurt. We know little of him today, but it seems Abdullah was a stately person, with a graceful demeanor and a ready, eloquent tongue. He also knew how to disguise his sentiments, and indeed he had many qualities of a shrewd politician. Hence, he professed great friendship for Muhammad and attended many of his meetings together with his companions. Covertly, the Muslims claim, Abdullah harbored a grudge against Muhammad, since he had disrupted his ascent to

power. Still, he maintained a pleasant relationship with his nemesis who, captivated by Abdullah's appearance, winning conversation, and apparent deference, did not at first suspect deception.

But as time passed, and they met more often, Muhammad is said to have learned that Abdullah not only envied his popularity, but cherished a secret animosity against him. He also discovered that Abdullah's companions were equally false in their friendship. Hence he stamped them "The Hypocrites," an appellation under which, he delivered a whole Sura for the benefit of his followers. Despite his supposedly two-faced nature, however, Abdullah Ubayy is not known to have caused Muhammad any serious problem.

Soon after settling in Medina, Muhammad decided to build a mosque. He selected a cemetery shaded by date palms, reportedly guided there by his camel. To build the mosque, he had the buried dead bodies removed and the trees chopped down. Because the climate of Medina was mildly hot and rain was infrequent, Muhammad built his mosque on the pattern of Medina dwellings, which had existed from the time the Bedouin Arabs had learned to live in homes.

The mosque turned out to be a simple structure, well-suited to the religion that Muhammad was preaching in Mecca, and to the precarious means of its votaries. The walls were mud daubed onto wattle, and the trunks of newly-felled palm trees served as pillars for the roof, made of branches and thatched with leaves. It had three openings: One to the south (the *Qibla*, or the direction Muslims face in prayer), another called the Gate of Gabriel (through which the angel entered the mosque unseen by human eyes), and the third called the Gate of

Mercy. Muhammad set aside part of the mosque for his homeless disciples to dwell in.

Muhammad constructed his living quarters next to the mosque, using the same materials with which he built the mosque. Since the Arabs had no access to timber at this time, the cabins of Muhammad's quarters lacked doors. They merely had strips of animal hide, hung up to screen their entrance. In those open cabins once lived at least nine of his wives, and an unknown number of his slave-girls!

This mosque is now known as *Masjidul al-Nabi* (the Mosque of the Prophet), because Muhammad himself founded and built it, and because his followers buried his remains on its grounds.

When he finished the mosque, Muhammad found himself undecided about how to summon his followers to the mosque to say their prayer. Should he use trumpets as Jews did, or light fires (a very difficult task), or have timbrels beaten?

While he was groping with this perplexity, Abdullah — the son of Zaid, the freed slave and adopted son of Muhammad whose wife the Prophet of Islam, with the approval of Allah, would snatch away later [Q 33:37] — came to his rescue by suggesting a series of words to be cried aloud, which he declared Allah had given him in a dream.

Muhammad adopted it instantly, and thus arose the summons, which to this day rings out five times a day from the lofty minarets of mosques worldwide, calling Muslims to the place of worship. It begins, "Allah is great! Allah is great! There is no Allah but Allah." At dawn an exhortation appears at the end: "Prayer is better than sleep!" Muslims across the globe call it "Azan."

R.V.C. Bodley, however, suggests that Muhammad himself had composed the lines, thus providing the reason to many to ask: When Muhammad was able to compose the lyrical lines of the Azan, will it be unreasonable for them to conclude that the verses of the Quran were also composed by him?

Belal Habshi, a freed black slave reputed to have a resonant voice, was the first person given the responsibility by Muhammad of crying aloud the Azan every day. Even now Muslims honor him for having performed his duty well till the last day of his life.

At first, Muhammad conducted everything in this mosque with great simplicity. At night, he lit it with lamps of fire, using raw green trunks and leaves of a tree that Allah had created, specially for the people of the Arabian Peninsula. Since no means of preserving fire then existed, they relied on this tree every time they needed a fire. After the death of Muhammad, this tree became extinct!

Muhammad stood on the ground of the mosque and preached, leaning back against one of the date palm pillars. Later, he erected a pulpit, using dead date trees, at the top of three steps to elevate himself above the congregation. According to tradition, when he first ascended the pulpit, the dead date trees emitted a groan. He thus gave them a choice: removal to an earthly garden to flourish again, or transportation to a Garden in the sky, there to yield fruit in the afterlife to feed the true believers. The date trees, it is said, wisely chose the latter, awaiting their reward on the Day of Judgment!

In the period just after his arrival in Medina, Muhammad's conduct and preaching were sober, peaceful, and benign. Impressed by his earlier deportment, some local Christians

promptly joined his followers. They were, perhaps, those Christians who ascribed human nature to Jesus Christ, and they found nothing repugnant in the doctrines of Islam Muhammad preached in Mecca and in Medina in the early days of his arrival there. But with the passage of time and the gradual increase in his political strength, his manner became harsh, threatening and belligerent. The Quran bears testimony to this fact.

Islam exalts Jesus as one of the greatest among 124,000 to 240,000 prophets Allah is said to have sent to earth from the time of Adam through Muhammad — the latter being the final and the greatest of them all. Despite this exulted position granted by Allah to Muhammad, his name appears only 5 times in the Quran, as opposed to 27 times for Jesus Christ! He was an apostle as well as a prophet of Allah.

By one count, the name of Moses appears 143 times in the Quran. According to it, he was first among the believers or Muslims on earth. The few Medina Christians who did not convert, nonetheless, showed no hostility toward Islam, considering it far better than idolatry they had grown disenchanted with over a long period of time. They had also grown weary of the schisms that had slowly entered their lives. Rooted in the Christian orthodoxy, these dissensions weakened their enthusiasm for their religion and inclined them toward Muhammad's doctrines.

The situation with Jews of Medina was different. Most were rich and belonged to powerful families. Consequently, they were not willing to show favor either to Muhammad or to his new religion. Anxious, however, to woo them over, he modeled many of his teachings on Jewish dogmas and observed a number of their religious requirements, such as

giving alms and fasting on the day of Ashura. [Q 7:143] He also allowed the few Jews who had embraced Islam to continue observing their Sabbath on Saturday and, following Mosaic laws, he even ordered his followers to circumcise their male offspring, a practice that Muslims follow even today. As he had adopted some of the Jewish traditions without Allah's approval, they failed to appear in the pages of the Quran!

But despite his best efforts, Muhammad failed to bring the obstinate Jews into his fold. Yet, he did not stop pursuing them. Being in Medina only for a short time, it was the best strategy he could have adopted for buying time, which he badly needed to strengthen his position and ultimately show Jews their proper place on the planet earth, which belongs to Allah and to His obedient servants. But as years passed, he began to realize that dealing with Jews was not easy and that they had the ability to destroy him and his religion. He took them very seriously.

By custom, most religions of the East had a *qibla*, or sacred point, which their followers faced at prayer. The Sabeans, mentioned in the Quran, looked toward the North Star, the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians faced the rising sun, and Jews turned to their holy city of Jerusalem. Before migrating to Medina, Muslims faced the Ka'aba, as did their Pagan foes. But in Medina Muhammad yielded to political discretion, deferred to Judaism, and made Jerusalem his *qibla*. Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad's early biographer, states that the Prophet had at one time required his followers to face Syria. He had developed a mysterious reverence for that country, the biographer says, believing that it had given shelter to the patriarch Abraham after his enemies forced him out of Chaldea, his birthplace.

On one front, Muhammad felt pleased with the state of his affairs in Medina. He was an honored guest, with a strong prospect of winning coverts, in contrast to the cul-de-sac in Mecca, where he had converted only about 100 Pagans in some 13 years of hard work. Yet at the same time, he faced a new problem: Starvation, sickness, and discontent had begun to afflict his followers from Mecca whose faithfulness was crucial to his cause. In spite of receiving maximum support from the Ansars, the Meccan fugitives lacked money to buy food and their ribs were showing. Moreover, they were unaccustomed to the milder climate of their adopted city, and many suffered fever and other diseases. In their illness and loneliness, they longed to see the loved ones they had left behind in Mecca.

Sensing the gravity of the situation, Muhammad established bonds of brotherhood between 54 emigrants and 54 Ansars from Medina. Each person thus paired pledged to remain together in trials and triumph. Indeed, this tie knit their interests more firmly than that with their kindred. For instance, they were to inherit possessions from each other before their blood relations. This brotherhood not only gave the emigrants new homes and close links with the Ansars, it also enabled them to share their wives.

To alleviate their financial difficulties, which their Ansar brothers could not eliminate due to their own constraints, Muhammad divided the emigrants into groups of beggars and deputed them to collect alms (*sadaqa*) from the well-to-do Jews of Medina. At the end of each day, they deposited their gains with him. As administrator, he retained a good portion of the sum for his own upkeep and distributed the residue among them. [Cf. Q 9:60] They protested, but Allah defended him by

turning their protest into an act of slander against His beloved Prophet. [Cf. Q 9:58]

"I Am Sent with the Sword!"

While Muhammad was tirelessly seeking to convert the idolatrous Pagans to Islam and provide for his impecunious followers from Mecca, his patient, peaceful personality was, simultaneously, undergoing a gradual but serious change. He now began to treat himself as an executive leader of his growing community. He assumed the image of a powerful leader, and entered politics, aiming to take over the administration and justice system of Medina. He also took steps to teach his followers certain manners, which they needed to observe while dealing or interacting with him and his wives. These actions greatly alarmed the local Jewish community.

Knowing that he would not succeed in his mission without completely winning the Jews to his side, Muhammad launched a series of initiatives, which he expected would allay their fear of him and turn them into his followers. At the same time, he also tried to cheat them with a very clever trick.

It was the so-called Covenant of Medina, which Muhammad supposedly entered into with Jews of the city. Muslim as well the non-Muslim scholars have lauded this Covenant, and have gone so far as to call it the world's first constitution. We will examine this document, as preserved for us by Ibn Ishaq, to break the myth that the bigoted Muslim scholars and the ill-informed non-Muslim scholars have woven around it.

Muhammad is believed to have concluded the Covenant with Jews in 624 A.D., or about two years after his arrival in Medina. At this time, Jews in town far outnumbered Muslims.

Since they were opposed to Muhammad and his doctrines, there was no reason for them to conclude a Covenant with him that would have established him as their ruler and stripped away their right to oppose him. Consequently, they must have rejected the idea. Undaunted, Muhammad drew up a unilateral and self-serving document with the intention of using it against Jews, when he would be able to do so. We are basing our hypothesis on the following factors:

1) The Covenant required Jews to admit that Muhammad was the apostle of Allah, a demand that they had consistently and persistently rejected.

2) It required Jews to show absolute loyalty to Muhammad and to refer all of their disputes to him and Allah for resolution.

3) It required them to pay all the cost of wars with the Quraish for as long they lasted, despite the fact that Jews had no problem or dispute with them.

4) It required Jews to grant no protection to the Quraish and their helpers.

5) And it required them to agree that Allah had approved the terms of the Covenant. [*Sirat Rasulallah*, pp. 232-33]

The fact that the Covenant began with the words "This is a document from Muhammad the prophet [governing the relations] between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib…" makes it clear that Jews played no role in its formation. Nor is there any evidence that they consented to its remarkable terms. It was therefore a command, not an agreement, and it had devastating repercussions for Jews. Their refusal to assent to the so-called Covenant turned Muhammad into their deadly foe. The enmity of the merciful

Prophet proved very costly for them; they not only lost many lives to his sword, they also lost many of their women and properties to his insatiable lust and greed.

The text of the Covenant throws light on another aspect of Muhammad's personality. By stating that the document had Allah's approval and that the curse of Allah and His anger on the Day of Resurrection would be upon those who did not honor its terms, [Ibn Ishaq, p. 232] Muhammad also presented himself in the person of Allah. In other words, he acted in both his own capacity and Allah's. Of course, Jews couldn't possibly verify that Allah had approved the terms of the Covenant, since they had no access, or way to talk to Him! It would have been a different matter if Muhammad had said he received the Covenant from Allah in a revelation. There is no indication that he did, nor is there any indication that angel Gabriel dictated the text to him. Therefore, we can safely assume that the Covenant was Muhammad's own handiwork, and through its contents, he implicitly made it clear that he was Allah, whom Muslims have been worshipping from the time Islam came into existence.

The Medinese Pagans typically spent long hours in Jewish quarters, discussing topics related to their religion and society. Jews believed that their creed was a superior one and that the Pagans professed a lesser faith. They therefore often taunted their visitors when the opportunity arose. Compelled by their financial and social conditions, the Pagans tolerated these excesses quietly and patiently.

The Jewish rabbis prided themselves on their lofty position among their co-believers, on account of their religious erudition. They too treated the heathens contemptuously because of their supposedly inferior beliefs and practices.

Used to an elevated standing, the rabbis dealt with Muhammad much in the same way they had reserved for their Pagan neighbors. They thought he was simply an upstart and that they could get away with harassing him as they chose. They therefore took immense pleasure in quizzing Muhammad about the Old Testament stories, which he was fond of quoting haphazardly in his sermons. One of their questions related to the plagues that Moses had supposedly subjected the Egyptians to before his exodus from their country. They often asked him questions with a view to revealing his ignorance and making him look foolish. They ridiculed his religious doctrines as well.

The rabbis also rejected his claim that he was the same Messiah whose impending arrival their Scriptures had foretold. They pointed out that since he was not a descendent of David, he could not possibly be their Messiah. Muhammad strongly resented the rabbis' disdain, which they showered down on him at every opportunity. His followers from Mecca were not as tactful as he was, nor as docile as the Medinese Pagans, and they are said to have fought many fistfights with the rabbis' disciples over objectionable remarks the latter made against their Prophet and Islam.

The ongoing ridicule, coupled with the rigors of his mission, starvation, poverty, and his privately-held equation of Judaism with prosperity, severely stirred Muhammad's mind. There came a moment when he was inclined to accept the rabbis' teachings and become a Jew along with his followers [Cf. Q 13:37; 45:18 & 19] if Jews and their rabbis would accord him a position of respect with an attractive financial package. Jews failed to read his mind and continued to abuse him.

Disappointed by their non-responsiveness and realizing that Judaism in any case did not consider converts to be true Jews, Muhammad found himself facing the worst crisis of his life. If he failed in his mission, Jews of Medina would not let him live in their midst. And if he returned to Mecca, its citizens were sure to hate him, ostracize him and deprive him of the crucial tribal protection in retaliation for the damage he had caused their society. Without tribal protection, his survival in Mecca would have become almost impossible.

Muhammad was in a fix, and he needed an escape at any cost. But when he saw no escape, he decided to stick to his mission and, admitting the threat to his existence, [Cf. Q, 13:37] he began to work aggressively and unethically to ensure his success. To boost his morale, he had Allah tell him to expound His message openly, leaving all enemies to Him, for He was "sufficient unto him {Muhammad} to deal with those who scoffed at him." [Q 15:94-95] His ignorance and plagiarism of Jewish beliefs notwithstanding, Muhammad soon saw that his effort to convert the Medinese Pagans was gradually paying off. Abdullah ibn Ubayy naturally found this success unwelcome, yet being a wise and prudent man, he concealed his pique and before long he too declared himself a convert to Islam. Yet he remained the leader of those Arabs who secretly sneered at Muhammad's teachings, complaining of the confusion and danger the arrival of Muslims had brought to Medina and to its social and religious life.

Muhammad, for his part, did not remain ignorant of the false Muslims' intentions, for spies [Cf. Q 57:7. Vide verse 4:108, Allah disguised Himself and sat among the people to spy on them] were quick to bring him information (for him, this, too, was a revelation from Allah) about the ill designs

they allegedly harbored against him. However, as a shrewd politician and mature tactician, he opted to co-exist with them for the time being, giving no hint of his own future designs against them.

Let us now reflect on how Muhammad must have felt on the eve of becoming the virtual ruler of Medina. As a highly intelligent and ambitious man, he realized the potential of the highest office of Medina. It would fully compensate him for all the harm, including the slights and emotional injuries, he had meekly suffered. As the undisputed ruler of Medina, he would control a powerful army of men drawn from local converts and fugitives who had flocked to him from Mecca, and proselytes from the desert tribes who were resolute in spirit, skilled in arms, and fond of partisan warfare. He would have the chance to eliminate Judaism from the face of the city. And he could also retaliate decisively against those who opposed him and his mission.

Muhammad's apostolic office would greatly supplement his military power whose use he would legitimize with the help of revelations from Allah. At least, such was the purport of a manifesto he is said to have made known at this time, thereby hoping to change the whole tone and fortune of his faith.

"Different prophets," he reportedly said, "have been sent by Allah to illustrate his different attributes: Moses his clemency and providence; Solomon his wisdom, majesty, and glory; Jesus Christ his righteousness, omniscience, and power – his righteousness by purity of conduct, his omniscience by the knowledge he displayed of the secrets of all hearts, his power by the miracles he wrought. None of these attributes, however, has been sufficient to enforce conviction, and even

the miracles of Moses and Jesus have been treated with disbelief. I, therefore, the last of the prophets, am sent with the sword! Let those who promulgate my faith enter into no argument nor discussion, but slay all who refuse obedience to the law. Whoever fights for the true faith, whether he fall or conquer, will assuredly receive a glorious reward."

"The sword," Muhammad added, "is the key of heaven and Hell; all who draw it in the cause of the faith will be rewarded with temporal advantages; every drop shed of their blood, every peril and hardship endured by them, will be registered on high as more meritorious than even fasting or praying. If they fall in battle, their sins will, at once, be blotted out, and they will be transported to paradise, there to revel in eternal pleasures in the arms of black-eyed houris." [Washington Irving; *op. cit*. p. 96]

Considering these inducements insufficient, Muhammad added predestination, which he borrowed from Zoroastrianism to excite Muslims further. Every event, he stated, was pre-set from eternity and thus unavoidable. No man could perish sooner or later than his allotted hour, and when it arrived it would make no difference whether the angels of death found him in the comfort of bed or the storm of battle. No person on earth could suffer or die without Allah's Will.

We ask: If all these claims are true, can we hold the devil responsible for inciting the humans to evil acts, including murder? If incitement and murders are predetermined, how can we blame the agents who carry them out? Was Hitler just Allah's puppet? These are perplexing questions and they need an answer from those Muslims who can read Allah's mind as easily as a radiologist today reads the X-ray films!

The desert Arabs found Muhammad's new, belligerent dogmas agreeable, for they harmonized with their habits and indeed encouraged their predatory propensities. Virtual pirates of the deserts, many of them rushed to Muhammad's side when he promulgated the doctrines of the religion of sword in Medina. Though his followers were slowly growing in number, for some time he withheld authorization to launch violent acts against the Meccan Pagans, Jews and Christians. Instead, he gave the Unbelievers a chance to submit to his temporal authority and pay him tribute.

This was a shrewd decision. It enabled him to collect resources to feed and maintain his hungry converts, as well as to acquire the sinews of war he would need to make his mission successful. Very soon, however, Muhammad realized that the revenue he was collecting in tribute from the Unbelievers fell far short of the amount he needed to feed and clothe his starving, ragged followers. He therefore decided to start raiding the Meccan caravans.

At the outset, Muhammad launched three attacks on the Meccan caravans. His able lieutenants headed all of them, yet none yielded material result. The fourth he entrusted to Abdullah ibn Jahsh, whom he sent out with eight or ten resolute brigands on the road to South Arabia. As it happened to be the month of *Radhjab*, considered holy by the Pagans and thus free from violence and rapine, Abdullah had sealed orders from Muhammad, not to be opened by him until the third day of his mission. The orders were vague. They required Abdullah to reach the valley of Nakhla, which lies between Mecca and Taif, where he should expect to meet a caravan of the Quraish of Mecca. "Perhaps," the orders

shrewdly concluded, "thou mayest be able to bring us some tidings of it."

Historians do not know the material Muhammad wrote this order on. Some, however, surmise that he used a rock, a tree-leaf, or an animal skin, which Abdullah carefully carried with him. At the time of perusing its contents, he also exercised great caution to preserve its integrity. Yet this document of great historical importance became a victim of time, depriving historians of the opportunity to see and read it with their own eyes! Abdullah understood the meaning of Muhammad's words and meant to act on them. In the valley of Nakhla, he spotted the caravan, consisting of several camels laden with merchandise and led by four men. He sent one of his men, disguised as a pilgrim, to overtake it. The Quraishites talked with him and took him and his companions to be pilgrims, bound for Mecca. And since it was a holy month, they did not suspect them to have nefarious designs. But hardly had they come to a halt, when Abdullah and his band fell on them, killing one and taking two prisoners. The fourth escaped. The deceptive victors then returned to Medina with their prisoners and the Allah-given booty.

This violation of the holy month scandalized the entire city of Medina. Muhammad found himself in an indefensible position. He feigned anger with Abdullah for some time and refused to accept his share of the loot. Referring to the vagueness of his instructions, he insisted that he had not commanded Abdullah to shed blood or to commit violence. When the disgust, shared by the Quraish, persisted in Medina, Muhammad produced a revelation from Allah telling him:

"*They ask thee concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. Say: Fighting therein is a grave (offence); but graver is it in the sight of*

Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and drive out its members. Tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter." [Quran, 2:217]

Thus legitimizing his deed, Muhammad accepted his and Allah's portions of the booty. He released one of the prisoners on payment of ransom; the other embraced Islam. During the 17 or 18 months Muhammad had lived in Medina, friction between him and Jews reached a significant intensity. One contributory factor was Jews' refusal to give alms to the Muslim beggars. Their wealth and niggardliness made him hate them from the bottom of his heart. Not satisfied with the extreme hardship Jews were inflicting on him, one of them even 'bewitched the apostle of Allah so that he could not come to his wives.' [Ibn Ishaq, p. 240. Commenting on this, Suhayli asserts that the story is true and accepted by the Muslim traditionists. Mutazilla and the Modernists rejected it on the grounds that prophets could not be bewitched. Otherwise they would commit sin] Therefore to signal his displeasure with them and his desire to live apart from them, he discarded the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday and replaced it with Friday for his Muslim followers.

He also ordered them to pray facing Mecca, instead of Jerusalem. Scholars are not sure exactly when the Muslims' obligatory prayer assumed its present form. However, they agree that there were only three daily prayers in Muhammad's lifetime. No scholar of Islam knows when or how their number increased to five. To cover up this anomaly, Muslim scholars tell us that the daily five prayers were ordained by Allah when Muhammad visited Him in the seventh heaven.

During the same period, Muhammad laid down many more tenets of Islam. One was the requirement of fasting.

Because Jews fasted in the lunar month of *Ramadhan* for ten days, [Phillip K. Hitti, *op. cit*. p. 133] he required his followers to fast for ten days as well, and on the same days as Jews. He thus sought to convey to Jews that his religion was not much different from theirs, but they remained unconvinced. Frustrated, he expanded the fast from ten days to the whole month of *Ramadhan*, to distinguish the Muslim fast from the Jewish fast.

It was a strong signal to Jews to change their attitude toward Muhammad and address his growing power. But they believed they were invincible and took no notice of it— a mistake they would deeply regret.

Step One in the Great Conquest: The Battle of Badr

The strategic location of Medina allowed its inhabitants to intercept, if they liked, caravans voyaging to Syria and back to Mecca. In the autumn of 623 A.D., the annual caravan of the Quraishites traveled through this route on its way to Syria. It consisted of 1,000 camels said to be laden with Arabian merchandise. Abu Sufian, one of Muhammad's sworn and staunch enemies, commanded it. Muslims tried to intercept it, but failed.

It left Damascus on its way back to Mecca, escorted by only 40 unarmed men [Quran; 8:7. Also see Abdullah Yusuf Ali's comment, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 416] in the month of *Ramadhan*, 624 A.D. Muhammad learned of its approach and decided to seize it, no matter how, even though the Arabs considered raids in this month a great sin. He needed to seize the caravan, because it had a considerable importance for him and the whole Muslim community of Medina.

The caravan represented a large part of the annual income of all the Meccans, for though the city's rich merchants owned

much of it, almost every resident also had a share in this venture. Hence, if Muslims captured it, the Meccans would become paupers and the plunderers wealthy overnight, with their leader's war chest greatly strengthened.

Muhammad set out to intercept the caravan with 314 men: 83 emigrants from Mecca, 61 Ausites, and 170 Khazrajites. The entire Muslim force, it is said, had only two horses and 70 camels. The troop mounted them in rotation to make a rapid march, with minimal fatigue. They reached a valley watered by the brook of Badr and waited for the caravan to approach the ford, which they were expected to cross on their way to Mecca.

But 100 miles south of Damascus, Abu Sufian heard that Muhammad was waiting in ambush with an army near Medina. He quickly dispatched a messenger to Mecca on a dromedary, calling on the Quraishites to send an armed force to meet and escort him past the danger zone of Medina. When this news reached Mecca, Abu Jahl sounded the alarm. Confusion and consternation took over the town, and people assembled around him to decide what action to take.

Hind, Abu Sufian's wife, possessed a firm determination and a fierce, intrepid nature. She exhorted her relatives and all other warriors to arm themselves and hasten to aid her husband. The assembly agreed. Soon a Meccan force of about 1,000 men, divided into cavalry and infantry, was marching to Medina under the command of Abu Jahl who though 70, retained the vigor and spirit of a youth.

While the rescue force was swiftly advancing to a point where it expected to meet the caravan, Abu Sufian was approaching it from the opposite direction. On nearing the danger zone, he moved considerably farther ahead of his

caravan and scanned every track and footprint on the road. Eventually, he came upon the track of Muhammad's army, guided to it by the discarded stones of dates, which his soldiers had eaten during their march. The pits of Medinese dates are recognizable by their small size.

Abu Sufian instantly changed course and passed along the coast of the Red Sea until he believed he was out of danger. He then sent an envoy to advise the Quraishites that his caravan was safe and that they could return home.

The envoy encountered the Quraishites in full march. Upon hearing Abu Sufian's message, they halted to chart their next course of action. At the same time, they sent a scout to collect information on the strength and condition of Muhammad's fighting men. The spy brought back word that they numbered about 300 and lacked enough horses or camels to win a battle.

A debate ensued. Many Meccans favored a battle to punish Muhammad and his followers for slaying their men at Nakhla. Another group opposed shedding the blood of their kindred, even though Muhammad had attempted to seize their life-supporting caravans and he had sown seeds of discord by preaching a religion that separated son from father, brother from brother. Abu Jahl sided with the belligerents and the main body of the Meccan troops resumed its march once again. From 300 to 400 of the men returned to Mecca, as they were not willing to engage Muhammad and his followers in a bloody battle, his excesses against them and their religion notwithstanding.

Meanwhile, the Muslim force wondered why the caravan had not reached the ford and decided to march to the water wells of Badr, where they were sure to meet it head on. After passing Safra, Muhammad called a halt. Here, an informant

told him that a strong contingent of the Quraishites had left Mecca to escort their caravan. This man, however, failed to give Muhammad the exact location of the Meccan forces. Muhammad convened a meeting and explained the situation to his men. Abu Bakr, Omar, and the emigrants declared their readiness to follow Muhammad, no matter where he led them to.

Muhammad was, however, not sure of the exact attitude of the Ansars toward his attempt to seize the caravan. They had concluded the Pledge of Aqaba with him for defensive matters, but it had not required them to support offensive acts such as raiding a peaceful and unarmed caravan. Therefore, he decided to address the Ansars. When Muhammad finished his presentation, the Aus chief Saad ibn Muadh stood up and gave him his unwavering pledge to obey him in any task he might be asked to accomplish. Elated, Muhammad ordered his troops to march forward "in good courage, for Allah has promised us one of the two parties," [The Quran, 8:7] meaning either the caravan, or the Quraish army.

After marching another six or seven miles, the Muslim forces set up tents a short distance from the wells of Badr, which the opposing army was also approaching, each ignorant of the other's position. The informant employed by Muhammad brought him news that the Meccan forces were on their way toward his troops' camp. The hearts of some of Muhammad's fighters sank, for they had joined the foray expecting little fight and much plunder. Now, they felt overwhelmed by the prospect of fighting a large army, the likes of which they had never confronted before. Muhammad assured them of victory, having Allah tell him: "*O Apostle! Rouse the Believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you,*

patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: For these are a people without understanding." [The Quran, 8:65]

Muhammad's above statement was based on the Meccans' reported strength of about 1,000 fighters. To boost his men's fighting spirits, he equated each one of them with ten of their enemies. When his men questioned the validity of the equation, he had Allah unashamedly revised His nonsensical statement, saying:

"*For the present, Allah hath lightened your (task), for He knoweth that there is a weak spot in you: But (even so), if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of Allah: For Allah is with those who patiently persevere*. [Q 8:66]

This one-for-two equation seemed reasonable to his fighting men, for they were 314 and their opponents' reduced number stood at about 600 to 700, which meant that each Muslim combatant had to defeat 1.91 to 2.23 of the Pagans to prevail. And to do so, they needed no heavenly intervention, for they expected the Meccan Pagans to face extremely difficult conditions at the battleground they had chosen for them.

After assuring success to his troops, Muhammad positioned them on a raised ground, with water at its foot. The troops erected a hut of date-palm fronds on the summit for Muhammad to take rest in. They also kept a fleet camel standing by for him to escape on, should the Meccan army defeat them.

The vanguard of the Meccan troops entered the ground, panting with thirst, and rushed to the stream for a drink.

Hamza, the uncle of Muhammad, set his men on them and slew their commander with his own hand. Only a single Meccan escaped the carnage. The main body of the Meccan forces now arrived at the site of this massacre, challenging the bravest of the Muslim fighters to an equal combat. Many individual fights took place in which all of the Meccan challengers were defeated and slain. The battle turned into a melee.

Muslims, aware of their inferior strength, at first, adopted a defensive posture from their strategic position atop the hill. [Q 8:42] From there, they assailed the Meccans with flights of arrows whenever they sought to quench their intolerable thirst at the stream below. Throughout, Muhammad remained inside his hut, worrying about the outcome of the battle with his sworn enemy.

The sporadic arrow flights soon flared up into a furious sword fight. In spite of their superior numbers, the Quraishites faced many tactical disadvantages. They had advanced toward the Muslim force across soft sand dunes, which exhausted them, [Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet*, p. 49] whereas their opponents awaited them on a firm ground. Moreover, Muslims controlled the most essential commodity of desert warfare: Water. The Meccans had none, and without it no army— no matter how strong and large— could win a battle against even a nominal foe, much less the highly charged Muslim army Muhammad had raised.

Despite their difficulties, the Meccans were fiercely fighting the Muslim force, when a violent squall whipped sand into their faces and almost blinded them. “Gabriel,” cried Muhammad ecstatically, “with a thousand angels is falling upon the enemy!”

Subsequently, Allah increased the number of the angels to 3,000 strong — to defeat a force of between 600 and 700 infidels, battling under insurmountable conditions! Suddenly, as if to further bolster the faith of his fighters, Muhammad rushed out of his hut and, picking up a handful of dust, cast it at the Meccans and shouted, "Confusion on their faces." Ordering his men to charge, he cried, *"Fight, and fear not," for "the gates of Paradise are under the shade of sword. He will assuredly find instant admission, who falls fighting for the faith."*

While the battle raged, Abu Jahl who was urging his horse into the thickest of the conflict, received a scimitar blow and fell to the ground. Abdullah ibn Masoud put a foot on his breast and cut off his head.

The battle swayed back and forth for some time, without either side gaining a clear victory. At last, the Meccans began to waver and lose their ground. Suddenly, they broke and fled. Fifty of them remained dead on the ground and nearly the same number became prisoners. Eight Muslims were slain, and their names remain on record as the first martyrs to the faith of Islam.

Abdullah ibn Masoud brought the head of Abu Jahl to Muhammad. Eyeing the grisly trophy with exultation, he exclaimed, "This man was the Pharaoh of our Nation." Muslims who had fallen in battle were honorably interned; as to the bodies of the Quraishites, they were contemptuously thrown into a pit. The case of the captives became a problem for Muslims. Omar was for striking off their heads. Abu Bakr was in favor of ransoming them. Muhammad agreed with the latter suggestion, but decided to put two of the captives to death; one, named Nadhar, "for having ridiculed the Quran as a collection of Persian tales and fables; the other, named Okba,

for the attempt upon the life of Muhammad when he first preached in the Ka'aba." [Washington Irving; op. cit. pp. 103 & 104]

The number of Pagan casualties proves one point: that fewer Pagan warriors took part in the Battle of Badr than the Muslim historians have acknowledged. They exaggerated the Pagan strength to extol those Muslim virtues by which, most Muslims believe, Muhammad and his followers defeated the Pagans' "huge" force. Muslims employ this tactic even today, while urging their youths to take on and kill their infidel foes.

Similarly, the Battle of Badr may have been much less fierce than the Muslim historians describe. They may have exaggerated its intensity to depict Muhammad as a victim of the Pagans, and not as a perpetrator of the crime, which he had clearly committed against them and their religion.

Muslim scribes attribute Muhammad's success in this battle to invisible angelic participation, noting that 1,000 of them clad in long dazzling robes with white and yellow turbans, mounted on black and white stallions, came rushing like a blast and swept the Quraishites off their feet. They say a Pagan shepherd witnessed the miracle. "I was with a companion, a cousin," he recalled, "upon the fold of the mountain, watching the conflict, and waiting to join the victors to share the spoils. Suddenly we saw a great cloud moving toward us, and within it were the neighing of steeds and sound of trumpets. As it approached, we heard the terrific voice of the archangel as he urged his mare Haizum. 'Speed! Speed! Oh Haizum!' At which awful sound the heart of my companion burst with terror, and he died on the spot. I, too, had almost shared his fate."

Ibn Abbas corroborated the Pagan shepherd's declaration, and Muhammad himself confirmed his statement. The gist of the matter stands as follows: Allah sent a large contingent of angels to fight a small number of humans, and the angels rode airborne steeds — despite having their own wings to fly with— undetected by human eyes and senses!

The Spoils of War: Exegesis

Before the victorious Muslims returned to Medina, a quarrel broke out among them over the distribution of the spoils. Though the caravan of Abu Sufian, which Allah had promised to the believers, had escaped, much booty had befallen them in the form of weapons, camels, old cloth, and personal items. Moreover, ransom for the prisoners could yield a large sum of money, a prospect no Muslim soldier wanted to miss.

Muhammad ordered the plunder divided equally among Muslims who had taken part in the battle. This decision roused great dissatisfaction among the troops. Those who had actually fought and been most active in collecting the spoils demanded a larger share than those who had stood aloof from the fray and the old men who stayed behind to guard the camp. Resolution of this issue became a critical matter for Muhammad, since he was about to embark upon a career of predatory warfare.

Hence Muhammad had another vision, and we read of it in the eighth Sura, called Anfal, or the Spoils of War. It is an illuminating reading. It discusses the lessons the battle taught Muslims, and lays out the ground rules for victorious Muslims to distribute booty among themselves. It also wanders considerably and contains repeated efforts by Muhammad to reinforce belief among his followers. It is worth looking at in

some detail, for scrutiny shows us the raw Quran from Allah, the word-by-word text that exerts such influence over the Muslim minds today.

This Sura begins with Allah telling Muslims through Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam:

8:1: "*They ask thee concerning (things taken as) spoils of war. Say: "(Such) spoils are at the disposal of Allah and His Apostle: So fear Allah, and keep straight the relations between yourselves: Obey Allah and His Apostle, if ye do believe*."

Here, Muhammad boldly asserts his authority: All the booty belongs to Allah and me. Therefore, fear Allah and end your dispute. As true believers, accept what Allah and I are going to give you. The implication is: We don't have to give you anything.

8:2: "*For, Believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His Signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord*."

Read together with other verses of the Quran, this one bolsters our belief that Allah was none other than Muhammad himself.

Many things affect our lives on earth. The expression of love and affection to others draws us closer to a person. Brutal or murderous tendencies in another make us avoid him, and in fact the sight or mention of him can make us fearful and rouse a desire to punish him. (Scientists call this "indirect reciprocity." We have evolved to reward those we see doing good to others and punish those we see doing ill, and this mechanism actually makes human society possible.) But when we lack experience with these elements of human conduct, we have trouble appreciating what is good, bad, and worthy of

fear. We may live without yearning for love. We may not fear what we should.

Allah never lived or walked among the humans. No one has ever seen Him harm people, as so many humans have harmed each other in the past, and will in the future. Moreover, we hear repeatedly that Allah is caring, kind, loving, and compassionate. Now the question is: If He possesses all these attributes, is there any reason for Muslims to "feel a tremor in their hearts, when His name is mentioned"?

On the other hand, Muhammad was a human being and lived among people. In his lifetime, he committed many acts of murder and plunder. Even to his followers, and his enemies as well, he was a source of constant fear. Always an unpredictable man, his name or presence made people nervous and fearful. They also avoided his eyes, as his anger could make them concerned for their lives. [Cf. Q 9:56 and 57]

When such a man lived among people, would they not have felt "a tremor in their hearts" if one mentioned his name to them?

Declaring that those who put their trust in Allah, pray steadfastly, and spend freely in His cause are the true Believers — who enjoy dignity, forgiveness, and generous sustenance from their master— Muhammad aka Allah disclosed:

8:5: "*Just as thy Lord ordered thee out of thy house in truth even though a party among the Believers disliked it,*"

8:6: "*Disputing with thee concerning the Truth after it was made manifest, as if they were being driven to death and they (actually) saw it*."

8:7: "*Behold! Allah promised you one of the two (enemy) parties, that it should be yours: Ye wished that the one unarmed should be yours, but Allah willed to justify the Truth according to His words, to cut off the roots of the Unbelievers*, **-**"

8:8: "*That He might justify Truth and prove Falsehood false, distasteful though it be to those in guilt.*"

Verse 8:5 suggests that Muhammad had planned in advance to seize the caravan and that he left his home, in the words of the Quran, "in truth." More accurately rendered, this phrase approximates "to fight for justice," [From the translation of N.J. Dawood. "In truth" in the quoted verse does not make much sense. Maududi's translation reads: "in a righteous cause"] - an interesting euphemism for attacking and plundering an unarmed caravan. His followers were unwilling to follow him, because they could not believe such a rich caravan would travel without a squadron of heavily armed guards. When Muhammad insisted it was helpless, they still did not believe him; rather, as verse 8:6 indicates, they thought he was trying to lead them to certain death.

Muhammad persisted and eventually he convinced almost all of his 314 male followers to join him in the raid by reaffirming that the caravan was surely unarmed and that its seizure would bring them "generous sustenance" in the form of booty. But when they saw the 700 Meccans below the hill from them, they panicked, for they had never fought so many men before. Therefore, they wanted to know why Muhammad had not used his prophetic abilities to warn them that they would face such a large force!

Faced with this loud, reasonable, and embarrassing demand, Muhammad came out with a lie and stated: Allah had told you that you might have to fight and gain victory

over one of the two bands — the caravan or the army — but it was you who wished to seize the unarmed one. Nevertheless, forget about it and pay attention to what I am going to do for you: I will bestow great booty on you, provided you are willing to rout all the infidels now standing below the hill. Thus Truth can triumph and falsehood fail, though the wrongdoers wish otherwise. To help you succeed, I will bring from heaven one thousand angels, [Q 8:9] nay, three thousands angels, nay, five thousand angels, to fight against, and kill the 700 Pagans. [Cf. Q 3:124 and 125] And when my angels are in the battlefield, I will tell them:

8:12:""*…I am with you [so do not be afraid of the Pagans]: Give firmness to the Believers: I will instill terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: Smite ye above their necks and smite all their fingertips off them."*

8:13: "*This because they contended against Allah and His Apostle: If any contend against Allah and His Apostle, Allah is strict in punishment*.

8:14: "*Thus (will be said): 'Taste ye then of the (punishment): For those who resist Allah, is the penalty of the Fire.'"*

These verses, especially 8:12, expose to us the sadistic, brutal, ferocious and beast-like nature of Allah, or Muhammad. He wanted the angels to strike off the heads of the foes and pull off their fingertips to make them suffer terrible pain. Why? -Because they had resisted Him by not allowing Him to seize their caravan. Not contented with their violent death and torture, Allah will also punish them on the Day of Judgment, by flinging them into the noxious flames of Hell. Thus He proves that His anger at offending humans will cool only after He has subjected them to eternal torture. Can a

human or deity with such a vile nature be worthy of respect and goodwill?

Unaware that Allah's words about instilling terror into the Unbelievers' hearts were just a device to bolster their confidence in Him, the cowardly soldiers of Islam took Him seriously and calm returned to their minds. Since they were used to napping in the warm afternoon, and since they knew for sure that the Pagans would not be able to attack them from their disadvantageous position, they dozed off for awhile. Nature also smiled on them and released a shower of rain to soften, briefly, the scorching heat of the desert.

Claiming that it was He who had brought them ease and sleep and that it was also He who sent the rain down from heaven to clean them and remove the stain of Satan, Allah told His soldiers:

8:15: "*O ye who believe! When ye meet the Unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them.*"

8:16: "*If any do turn his back to them on such a day – unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own) – he draws on himself the wrath of Allah, and his abode is Hell – an evil refuge (indeed)!*

When the Muslim soldiers were napping, Allah appeared in their dream and played a dirty trick on them. As He was determined to use them to kill all the Pagans, He made them dream that their enemy numbered as few as 70 or 100, [Tafsir al-Jalalayn] for if He had shown them their actual strength, they would surely have disputed His will and felt reluctant to fight the Pagans. [Cf. Q 8:43] And to prove that the dream was not a lie, He also made the number of the Pagans seem small in their eyes when they actually met them on the battlefield.

Allah also played the same trick on the Pagans: He made the number of the Muslim soldiers appear small when they came face-to-face with them. [This contradicts what Allah had said in verse 3:13. According to it, He had made the Muslim soldiers appear twice than their actual size to the Pagans] He did this to accomplish His pre-ordained fate for them: [Cf. Q 8:44] Annihilation by the Muslim soldiers. The Muslim soldiers woke up from their nap, fully prepared and eager to face the infidels, and Allah alias Muhammad told them how they to arrange their battle formation to succeed in the battle. He also warned them not to flee. If they faced defeat, a craven flight would not only incur Allah's wrath in this world and induce Him to replace them with another people, [Q 9:39] but it would also bring down harsh punishment from Him on the Day of Judgment. They could, however, retreat as a military tactic.

Battle instructions over, Muhammad picked up a handful of dust and threw it toward the Pagans. This act implied that they had Allah's permission to take on their enemy and slaughter all of them with the help of Him and His angels.

Their morale boosted, their greed for booty sharpened, and their fear of punishment in their next life playing in their minds, the Muslim soldiers advanced. Five thousand invisible angels and Allah Himself, with swords in their hands, joined them as they jumped on the 700-plus infidels and began slashing off their heads and pulling off their fingertips. Faced with sure death and mutilation, the Pagans took to their heels after killing eight of Allah's fierce soldiers.

Allah, the angels, and the human soldiers pursued the fleeing infidels for awhile, but seeing them running for their

lives, they stopped and began collecting the booty their enemies had dropped to speed their flight.

The battle over, a victorious Muhammad and his soldiers, with Allah in their midst, began recounting how they had succeeded and killed 50 of their enemies. Since the Prophet was not sufficiently praising Allah's role in the campaign, He reminded him, saying:

8:17: "*It is not ye who slew them; it was Allah: When thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but Allah's: In order that He might test the Believers by a gracious trial from Himself: For Allah is He Who heareth and knoweth (all things).*

8:18: "*That, and also because Allah is He Who makes feeble the plans and stratagems of the Unbelievers.*"

8:19: "*(O Unbelievers!) If ye prayed for victory and judgment, now hath the judgment come to you: If ye desist (from wrong), it will be best for you: If ye return (to the attack), so shall We. Not the least good will your forces be to you even if they were multiplied: For verily Allah is with those who believe.*"

As we have noted before, Muhammad was delighted at his success over his Pagan foe. It bolstered his image as a leader and the Prophet of Allah. The men who had actually fought the battle were similarly elated. Extremely weary beforehand and frightened of their enemy's numerical superiority, they believed their success stemmed from the angelic intervention promised by Allah. Muhammad, for his part, avoided taking credit for the success, lest he be blamed for any future reversals. He also told his followers they did not deserve credit for their kills, lest they realize they were indispensable to him and assert greater power, to his disadvantage. Instead, he said Allah had killed the opponents.

Similarly, when his followers praised him for blinding the enemies by throwing a handful of dust at them, he attributed this miracle to Allah, adding that He had made it seem as if Muhammad were tossing the dust to bolster his followers' faith in Him. Allah had also enfeebled the stratagems of the infidels to ensure the believers' success over them. But in implementing his plan, Muhammad did not realize that he had assumed the role of Allah and spoken like Him. We will explain this aspect of his behavior momentarily. For now, let us find out when, and under what circumstances, Allah might have revealed verse 8:19, directed at the Unbelievers. It may have been simply rhetorical, issued to Muslims and therefore toothless. But assuming it had Unbelievers as an audience, it could not have happened when the battle was raging, for the noise and commotion would have muted it. It could not have happened when Muhammad was in his hut atop the hill, as the fleeing Pagans were out of shouting range and too busy trying to save their lives. So when did this verse come out of Muhammad or Allah's mouth?

We believe it came to Muhammad's mind before the battle, when the Pagans had assembled below the hill. Knowing that this was the right time to belittle the Meccan Pagans' deities for their expected ineffectiveness, as well as to notify them of severe consequences if they attacked Muslims then or ever, he took the role of Allah (as the word "We" in verse 8:19 implies) and issued the above warning. If they failed to heed him, he said, he as Allah would fight and defeat them, even if they came at him with a large force. After the victory, he rephrased the verse as a cry of triumph to make it even more effective. He also intended this message to serve notice on Jews of Medina — who disliked his presence there, as he interfered

with their religious practices — to watch what they did and said against him.

Muhammad called on the Believers to obey Allah and himself and not to turn away from him when he was speaking to them. He thus revealed that neo-Muslims not only flaunted his orders, but sought to avoid him. Allah went on to declare that the deaf and dumb are the worst of beasts in His sight, whom He would have forced to listen to His Apostle, if He had found anything good in them. Of course, Allah created deaf and dumb humans and once again He refused to take responsibility for His actions, but rather, blamed His victims for their shortcomings! Allah said:

8:24: "*O ye who believe! Give your response to Allah and His Apostle when He calleth you to that which will give you life; and know that Allah cometh in between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall (all) be gathered*."

Fighting for Allah was an alien notion for the Pagans-turned-Muslims, as their previous deities had not required them to risk their lives and kill others. Believing that religions ought to be peaceful and coercion-free, neo-Muslims often turned a deaf ear to Muhammad's call to fight and eviscerate those who did not believe in him and his religion. Such an attitude did not further his goals and his religion, so he issued the above verse to force them into his obedience.

And he added a critical reassurance: Muslims who fought and died in Allah's cause would become martyrs and dwell in the Gardens forever. This promise, coupled with the chance of winning loot in their earthly lives, was a tantalizing incentive and it succeeded in bringing neo-Muslims out onto the battlefield to fight and kill their own kin, friends, and non-blood relatives.

Islam began on this base and it lies at the heart of Islam even today. It requires Muslims' sons to murder their parents if they refuse to follow Islam. The same rule applies to the siblings as well as to all other blood and non-blood relatives; they must kill those among them who do not profess Islam or who have renounced it [Cf. Q 4:89] That is why Muslims do not leave Islam, even if they despise its dogmas. Muslims who renounce it do not publicize their decision for fear of dying at the hands of their Muslim relatives.

They also have to fear their Muslim neighbors and strangers as well, for any Muslim coming across an apostate must murder him to please Allah who will reward these servants of His with berths in the Gardens on the Day of Judgment. One finds exactly this kind of inhuman rule in terror cells. It makes Islam a cage.

Asking Muslims to guard themselves against tumult or oppression, which affect not only those who do wrong, but also the innocent, Allah told them:

8:26: "*Call to mind when ye were a small (band) despised through the land, and afraid that men might despoil and kidnap you; but He provided a safe asylum for you, strengthened you with His aid, and gave you good things for sustenance: That ye might be grateful.*"

Allah aka Muhammad addressed this verse to the small number of Muslims who had migrated to Medina. In Mecca, they had lived in constant fear that the Pagans might rob or kidnap them, and hence He found them an asylum in Medina. Yet they did not thank Him for His favor. He also made them strong and bestowed great benefits on them by way of war booty, and still they did not feel indebted to Him.

Questions are: Why Muslims did not express their gratitude to Allah, when they saw all the favors He was showering on them? And were they as ungrateful as the Hebrews, who, according to the Quran, always refused to acknowledge Allah as their Lord and who earlier had made Moses' life miserable by defying him and his teachings?

Leaving the questions to the reader's imagination, we will note what Allah aka Muhammad has said in the remaining verses of the Sura. Much of it does not directly address the Battle of Badr, but rather shows how Muhammad took all opportunities to reinforce the Believers' faith in him.

Allah called on Muslims to hold fast to His and His Apostle's trust and not to knowingly misappropriate things they entrusted to them. He added that their possessions and progeny were but a trial for them, and that He would remove evil from them if they believed in Him. Drawing Muhammad's attention to the Meccans' plan to keep him in bonds or to scare him, and how He Himself also planned to retaliate against them, as He was the best schemer (or cheater!), Allah told His audience:

8:31: "*When Our Signs are rehearsed to them, they say: 'We have heard this (before): If we wished, we could say (words) like these: These are nothing but tales of the ancients.'*" [We read this statement of the Pagans in verse 6:25]

This verse draws our attention to an important fact: The stories of Abraham, his sons, and Noah, Salih, Shuaib, Lut, and the rest were tales from ancient times and the Pagans had grown up listening to them from their elders. Muhammad was no exception; he, too, heard them and felt impressed by them.

So far, so good. The Pagans didn't care if the fables of the past impressed him. But his response became a problem when

he began narrating those tales to them, with the claim that Allah had given him the knowledge of the stories. The Pagans knew Muhammad was lying and the plagiarism was too much for them.

To show their annoyance, they told him: We know these tales too and we could narrate them in exactly the words you are using. Since the Pagans were correct, Allah dared not take issue with them. Instead, He waved the usual bludgeon. He would confront them on the Day of Judgment with the fire of Hell. [2 Cf. The Quran, 6:27]

Allah's failure to rebut the Pagans' claim makes it abundantly clear that all the stories of the past in the Quran came from Muhammad's own knowledge, which he had acquired from others in his own language. No divine revelation was involved. Muhammad's claim that Allah told him these tales was simply fraudulent. We do not know why Allah so often restated what the Pagans had told Muhammad and his followers, since the Pagans were very public with their complaints, unless it was for a sinister purpose. His intention aside, Muhammad reported Allah telling him:

8:32: "*Remember how they said: 'O Allah! If this is indeed the Truth from Thee, rain down on us a shower of stones from the sky, or send us a grievous Penalty.'*"

8:33: "*But Allah was not going to send them a Penalty whilst thou wast among them; nor was He going to send it whilst they could ask for pardon*."

Verse 8:32 reveals how frustrated the Pagans had become by Muhammad's pestering with his so-called revelations from Allah. Fed up with his threats of punishment in the name of the Deity they also worshipped, they prayed to Allah to provide a morsel of evidence for these claims. They actually

begged Him to punish them with a shower of stones or send some other terrible penalty if Muhammad's threats were genuine.

Since the trapped Muhammad had no way to respond, he had Allah assert, through him, that as long as he was in their midst, He would refuse to send them a penalty from the sky. Nor would He send it while they could ask His forgiveness, though He did not disclose how much time they had to seek it.

Though on the one hand Allah gave the Pagans unspecified time to seek His forgiveness, on the other He wanted to know why He shouldn't punish them for their behavior regarding the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. They were not its lawful guardians and they had kept others away from it. They were not entitled to revenue from the Ka'aba, since they were not righteous and they had profaned the Sacred Mosque by whistling and clapping their hands at prayer. For these offenses, Allah did bring down a penalty on the Pagans at the Battle of Badr, where 50 of them died.

Here, we note an unethical and unacceptable conduct of Allah, and it is alarming. We learn from the Quran that Allah had picked Muhammad from among the Pagans in Mecca to lead them to a way that was satisfactory to Him and good for them. They refused to follow the Prophet for almost 23 years, and all the while Allah remained extremely patient with them and others who rejected Islam.

Indeed, Allah refrained from serious action against the defiant Pagans, though they used a wide variety of arguments against His Messenger to frustrate his mission. Though He killed a small number of them with His own hand, and followed up by issuing threats of punishment in the world hereafter, He refrained from destroying them all, as His

Prophet was living in their midst. Allah waited almost two decades for the Pagans to repent and return to His path.

But He behaved very differently with the peoples of the prophets Noah, Lot, Hud, Salih, Shuaib, and the others. He completely destroyed their peoples for defying Him and adhering to their customary way of life. Though we do not know how much time Allah had granted these obdurate and errant peoples to repent, and how long their prophets had remained with them, it is clear that when He made His decision, He moved His prophets out of the area and then annihilated their people. But He did not annihilate the Meccan Pagans, even after Muhammad had moved out of their city. Why?

The fact that Allah had exercised extreme patience with one group of offending disbelievers but severely punished others shows that He is a highly whimsical Deity and that He has used His powers in a most arbitrary and disgusting manner. As He has admitted in the Quran, He has pardoned in the past whom He willed and punished those He did not like. He hates the Unbelievers. [Q 35:39]

He continues to do so even today. In other words, He acts like a dictator. He is lawless. Allah told Muhammad and his followers:

8:36: "*The Unbelievers spend their wealth to hinder (men) from the path of Allah, and so will they continue to spend; but in the end they will have (only) regrets and sighs; at length they will be overcome and the Unbelievers will be gathered together to Hell*; **-**"

8:37: "*In order that Allah may separate the impure from the pure, put the impure, one on another, heap them together, and cast them into Hell. They will be the ones to have lost*."

8:38: *"Say to the Unbelievers, if (now) they desist (from Unbelief), their past would be forgiven them; but if they persist, the punishment of those before them is already (a matter of warning [or time] for them."*

8:39: *"And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do."*

All the above four verses are clearly Medinese, and in them "Unbelievers" typically refers to the city's Jews. Though one of the two Peoples of the Book, they remained infidels, as they paid no homage to Muhammad and his prophethood. Allah made the above incendiary statements, recapitulating Jewish actions to thwart Muhammad before he became the supreme leader of his adopted city.

These verses convey an ominous threat that Allah had issued to Jews in the time of Muhammad. Terming them impure — He had first warned them to convert to Islam or He would change their faces and reputation "beyond all recognition and turn them hindwards" [Q 4:47] and then have them 'disfigured' with the help of their enemies' [Q 17:7] for the wrongs they had committed in the past — Allah declared that no matter what steps they might take against His Prophet, they would fail. In the end, Allah would overcome, have them disfigured, [Q 17:7] heap one upon another, and cast them into Hell. And "Hell" here is synonymous with a large trench or a mass grave. Allah would forgive them if they convert; otherwise, Muhammad would continue to fight and murder them until he has silenced them all, thus ridding himself of the tumult they were rousing against him everywhere. As we'll see, Muhammad successfully carried out this lethal threat.

Finally, Allah came to the heart of the Sura, the division of loot. Assuring Muhammad that He was his best protector, Allah decreed:

8:41: "*And know that out of all the booty that ye may acquire (in war), a fifth share is assigned to Allah, — and to the Apostle, and to near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer, — if ye do believe in Allah and in the revelation We sent down to Our Servant on the Day of Testing, — the Day of the meeting of the two forces. For Allah hath power over all things.*"

The booty, which the Muslim soldiers collected from the dead and fleeing Pagans, had become a tricky political problem for Muhammad, and he certainly wanted enough to ensure his own well-being. Hence Allah decreed that a fifth of all booty must go to Himself and Muhammad — the Commander of the Faithful — to be enjoyed and expended by both of them on "their near relatives" and others mentioned in the verse.

This dictum would make Muhammad a wealthy man [Cf. Q 93:6] and enable him to keep a harem. And though the principle derives from the 7th century, it is said to be still valid for emulation by all Muslim and non-Muslim military commanders of our modern world! Calling on Muslims to stand firm when they met a force like the one at Badr, to obey Him and His Apostle (thus minimizing internal disputes and strengthening them against the enemy), and to avoid acting with elation, insolence and vainglory, Allah said:

8:48: "*Remember Satan made their (sinful) acts seem alluring to them, and said: 'No one among men can overcome you this day, while I am near to you': But when the two forces came in sight of each other, he turned on his heels, and said: 'Lo! I am clear of you; lo!*

I see what ye see not; lo! I fear Allah, for Allah is strict in punishment.'"

Allah thus restates Satan's words to the Pagans before the Battle of Badr. Deeming the Meccans to be sinful for marching to Badr to defend their unarmed caravan, Allah informed Muslims that Satan inspired their self-defense. Indeed, Satan had encouraged the Meccans to take on Muslims with the promise that as long as he was there, nobody could overcome them. But when he saw the angels ("I see what ye see not"), he turned on his tail and fled. Bereft of Satan's aid, the Pagans suffered a crushing defeat from Muslims and the invisible battalion of the angels.

Satan's claim that he had seen the angels with his own eyes makes following statement about the angels' participation in the Battle of Badr controversial:

"*Allah made it [that is, the angels' participation] but a message of hope and assurance to your hearts: (In any case) there is no help except from Allah: And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise*." [Quran, 8:10]

Allah promised He would help Muslims at Badr with thousands of martial angels, yet this verse indicates He did not intend to actually send the angels onto the battlefield. He uttered this falsehood simply to soothe their hearts, which were sinking at the prospect of fighting the huge Meccan army marching towards them.

Now the question is: If Allah had not deputed the angels to help Muslims fight the Pagans, what did Satan see that Muslims did not? And: If it was not Allah's policy to depute angels in the battlefields, then who were the beings who helped Muslims in the later Battle of Hunain, without being seen by the human eyes?

Such inconsistencies are the hallmark of lying. As Sir Walter Scott put it: "Oh what a tangled web we weave/ When first we practice to deceive." Human liars always have trouble keeping their claims straight in their minds. They entangle themselves, despite their best efforts. And Muhammad was human. An all-powerful Allah would have had no such difficulty if He were the true source of the Quran!

Declaring that the hearts of the hypocrites were diseased, Allah told Muhammad: 8:50: "*If thou couldst see, when the angels take the souls of the Unbelievers (at death), (how) they smite their faces and their backs, (saying), 'Taste the penalty of the blazing Fire.'*"

Muhammad thus fantasized about how the angels would punish the Unbelievers at the time of taking away their souls. According to him, the angels strike their faces and backs, and the effect is similar to that of the flames of the Hell, because they committed deeds in the manner of the people of the Egyptian Pharaoh and those before them by rejecting His signs.

Such threats, along with the lure of booty, proved instrumental in the formative days of Islam to bringing the desert Bedouins into its fold. They also turned them into a community of savage animals who saw no wrong whatsoever in killing their own fathers, brothers, and other blood relatives and friends to advance the evil precepts of an evil man, Muhammad, which dominate the minds of over 1.4 billion Muslims even today. His utterances have divided all humanity into pure and impure, and authorized the "pure" to murder the "impure" to keep Allah's earth free from rebellion — though the omnipotent Allah Himself could easily prevent them from doing whatever He didn't want. And the notion

that killing might actually stain the "pure" does not seem to have occurred to Allah. Unfortunately, the world will have to live with the cruel precepts of Islam for so long as this manual of hate, terrorism, and the murder — the Quran — continues to rule the Muslim hearts.

Asking Muslims not to let the Unbelievers think that they could get the better of them, Allah instructed them through Muhammad:

8:60: "*Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the Cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly.*"

8:61: "*But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: For He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things*)."

8:62: "*Should they intend to deceive thee, – verily Allah sufficeth thee: He it is that hath strengthened thee with His aid and with (the company of) the Believers*."

Here is a strong manifesto of war that Muhammad had issued to his followers as well as to his Jewish enemies after his victory at Badr. In fact, Badr transformed him into a war-monger. It let him toss aside the mask of a peace-loving prophet that he had worn back in Mecca. After he tasted human blood at Badr, he developed a thirst for it. The booty he gathered from the slain and fleeing Meccans increased his lust for it even more, since it let him feed his hungry followers and boost his war efforts against the people he considered his enemies.

As we've seen, Allah/Muhammad first rallied his troops from their flagging resolve by telling them they were superhuman:

8:65: "*O Apostle! Rouse the Believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: If a hundred they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: For these are a people without understanding*."

But the person without understanding was Muhammad himself, for he didn't anticipate that Muslims wouldn't believe this claim. Perhaps he had grown so used to their nodding at his falsehoods that he had lost sense of the bounds of their credibility. So he modified it:

8:66: "*For the present, Allah hath lightened your (task), for He knoweth that there is a weak spot in you: But (even so), if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of Allah: For Allah is with those who patiently persevere*."

We quoted these verses in the last chapter, yet they call for further discussion so we can understand why, when, and under what circumstances Allah aka Muhammad might have made them, and disregarded some of the vital realities of his own time.

Seventh-century Arabs had no guns, bombs, or other lethal weapons to deploy against their enemies. Their most effective weapons were bow and arrow, poniard, sword, and lances. To use these weapons effectively, they relied heavily on fleet dromedaries and steeds. Given the restraints of the grounds and the debilitating effect of the desert heat, especially for the foot soldiers, no combatant — including Muhammad — could ever have hoped to kill ten enemies per battle. Verse 8:66 tacitly admits this fact.

The addition of "with the leave of Allah" (that is, Allah's Will) was a cunning ploy. It enabled Muhammad to extract himself from a difficult situation that he expected to face in future. For if a Muslim soldier failed to kill two enemies, he could attribute his failure to Allah's Will and sidestep responsibility for his falsehood about the soldier's prowess. Likewise, if an opponent killed a Muslim soldier, the explanation would lie in the Will of Allah. (Why Allah should desire such an outcome is a mystery.) Thus no one could blame Muhammad for his wild exhortations to Muslims before they agreed to risk their lives. As potent as the promises were, Allah could negate them at his inscrutable whim and convenience.

Allah told Muhammad:

8:67: "*It is not fitting for an Apostle that he should have prisoners of war until he hath thoroughly subdued the land. Ye look for the temporal goods of this world; but Allah looketh to the Hereafter: And Allah is Exalted in might, Wise.*"

8:68: "*Had it not been for a previous ordainment from Allah, a severe penalty would have reached you for the (ransom) that ye took*."

8:69: "*But (now) enjoy what ye took in war, lawful and good: But fear Allah: For Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful*."

Muslim scholars believe that Allah made the above statements after Muhammad's victory at Badr. In so doing, they refer to verse 47:4, revealed before this battle. It requires Muslims to fight those humans who refused to believe in Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad. Once on the battlefield, Muslims have Allah's instruction to strike off the heads of the Unbelievers. Then, after cowing them with slaughter, Muslims should fasten bonds tight around those

who have survived the massacre. When the war ends, Muslims can release the captives with no further reprisals if political expediency so dictates, or ransom them for money.

Muslims scholars are correct in their position, but they have not mentioned why Allah or Muhammad had said that it was not fitting for him to take prisoners of war, when he had already won the battle and the Quraish had fled! And also, why Allah would be looking to the permanent goods of the Hereafter, which are not for Him to enjoy? We believe verse 8:67 was introspection on Muhammad's part, for after taking 70 hostages at Badr, he realized that he had blundered in not chasing the Meccans and trying to kill all of them. If he had, he might have ended their opposition forever. He felt deeply dismayed and wanted to punish himself for his stupidity, but as a pragmatic and farsighted man, he instead conveyed his regret to his followers as a specific instruction:

Do not make the mistake I made. First eliminate the fighting men and then take the survivors as well as their young wives, daughters, and sisters as captives. You will derive two rewards: 1) You can ransom the men, and 2) You can keep their women as slaves for your sexual pleasure. And if you need money, you can sell them.

Unburdened of his dismay, he told himself and his followers: Enjoy the good things you have taken from the dead and fleeing Meccans, but fear me: For as I am merciful, I have often forgiven myself for my mistakes! Allah instructed Muhammad to tell the Badr captives that if He found anything good in their hearts, He would give them something better — only He knew what that "better" thing would be — than what Muslims had taken from them. Allah also told His Muslim audience in Medina:

8:73: "*The Unbelievers are protectors, one of another: Unless ye do this (protect each other), there would be tumult and oppression on earth, and great mischief*."

8:74: "*Those who believed, and adopted exile, and fight for the Faith in the cause of Allah, as well as those who give (them) asylum and aid,— these are (all) in very truth the Believers: For them is the forgiveness of sins and provisions most generous*."

These two clear, self-explanatory verses highlight one of the dangerous beliefs that Islam plants in the minds of Muslims. This so-called "religion of peace" divides humanity into two groups: 1) Unbelievers who do not credit Muhammad and who protect each other, and 2) Muslims who must be friends to each other and live in a community of their own to be able to similarly protect each other. Since the Unbelievers are the source of all tumult and oppression (*fitna* in Arabic) on earth, Muslims must therefore shun them, fight them, and kill them whenever possible — not only to rid the earth of their pestilent presence, but to establish His complete rule over all the world.

Since the above is the essential teaching of Islam, should we look for any other causes that might justify the animosity that Muslims harbor against the Unbelievers, including Hindus, Jews, Christians, and Buddhists? Let's think and see how we can extricate ourselves from the misconceptions many of us hold about Islam and its followers. Our success in doing so will save us from a danger that lurks behind us and will, when it overtakes us, destroy our lives unless we convert en masse to Islam. That will be the end of our civilization and the liberties we enjoy today.

Attacks on Poets and Medinese Jews

Muhammad and his troops returned in triumph to Medina with plunder and prisoners. Their success propelled their

prestige and morale to an extraordinary height. Savoring the fruits of victory, Muslims clamored for more expeditions against the Pagans, primarily to loot them and to turn their womenfolk into slaves.

Muhammad was not oblivious to the desires of his followers. In fact, he himself harbored such yearnings in his heart. But without a good opportunity, he dared not initiate an action that could have turned against him those Pagans who were seriously considering their conversion to Islam. Instead, Muhammad busied himself momentarily in propagating his faith.

He made little progress due to the assaults launched against him by the satirical poets of Medina. To deal with this menace, he engaged one of them to defend him. The middle-aged Hassan ibn Thabit was well-known as a poet and he had spent some years at the court of Bani Ghassan princes in Syria. When Muhammad asked if he could defend him from the attacks, he reputedly stuck out his tongue and declared, "There is no armor that I cannot pierce with this weapon."

Hassan's quick-witted responses did silence many of the Pagan and Jewish satirical poets. Still, some continued to ridicule Muhammad and his doctrines, so he decided to take his own measures.

He had Asma, a Jewish poetess, put to death for her barbs. Abu Afak, an Israelite of a very ripe age, was likewise slain for satirizing Muhammad. Kaab ibn Ashraf, a Jewish poet who tried to rouse the Quraishites to vengeance, also paid with his life for mocking the Prophet of Islam.

Having rid himself of the poets, Muhammad turned to another problem. Jews of Medina, he felt, were growing increasingly hostile to him and erecting stumbling blocks to

his success. He therefore decided to deal with them with an iron hand.

The victory at Badr had completely changed Muhammad's position. He was now a triumphant chief of a growing power, and he became very confident of success in campaigns against the enemies he saw around him. As a result, he began to look for chances to retaliate, especially against the Jews.

The Jewish community of Bani Qaynuqa gave him the first opportunity, with devastating effect on them and other Jewish communities of Medina and its surroundings. The members of this tribe were goldsmiths and they were probably the richest among the Jewish tribes. They numbered some 700, of whom 300 are said to have been armed. They also made armor, but owned no fields or fruit gardens. Muhammad demanded that Jews convert and pointed to the Meccan losses at Badr as an example if they defied him. Jews, however, were no readier than before to bow to him.

This independence infuriated him. To make them pay, he needed an excuse, and unwittingly one of the Bani Qaynuqa man soon gave him one. A Jew of this clan played a foul game with the skirt of a Muslim woman who was conducting her business in the market of Medina. When she stood up, a considerable portion of her person became exposed. A Muslim witness regarded this act and the ensuing laughter as an insult, and he killed the offending Jew. His fellows at once avenged him.

Muhammad seized upon the incident and demanded that the Bani Qaynuqa punish the killer of the Muslim man, accept him as prophet, and become Muslims. Otherwise, Allah would wreak on them the vengeance He had brought upon the Quraish at Badr. They replied: "O Muhammad, you

encountered a people with no knowledge of war and got better of them; for by Allah if we fight you, you will find that we are real men!" The message of resistance thus conveyed, they retired to their strongholds. Undeterred, Muhammad collected a large force and besieged them.

After a 15-day siege, Jews surrendered unconditionally. Muhammad sentenced them all to death. However, two tribes among the Aus and the Khazraj were allies of Bani Qaynuqa, and both had embraced Islam. Abdullah b. Ubayy of the Khazraj came to Muhammad and appealed to him to deal kindly with his clients, but the Prophet put him off. Ubayy repeated his appeal and the Prophet turned away from him, whereupon he thrust his hand into the collar of the apostle's robe; this made the Apostle very angry and his face became almost black.

Eventually the Prophet of Islam cooled down and permitted the Qaynuqa Jews to leave Medina with their wives and children. He gave them three days to assemble their personal belongings. However, he allowed them to take only as many animals as they needed to carry them to their destination. They had to leave behind their "smith tools," which one might conjecture they used in making weapons and armor.

The expulsion of these Jews from Medina helped Muhammad overcome some pressing problems. First, he could now provide accommodation for the Meccan refugees in the homes of the expelled Jews. Second, he could use the wealth they left behind to shore up his state exchequer and finance the expeditions he was already planning.

The expulsion of Jews of Qaynuqa made Muhammad more aggressive and he decided to rid Medina of the remaining two

strong, wealthy, and influential Jewish tribes. Hence, he instructed his followers to make themselves ready with fullest strength, including steeds of war, and strike terror into the hearts of Jews. They were, however, to restrain their offensives if their enemies inclined towards peace, that is, if they became Muslims and agreed to bear the cost of the wars Muslims were going to launch "in the cause of Allah." [According to Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Allah abrogated this verse by the "sword verse," 9:5]

What if their enemies tried to deceive them by becoming false Muslims? Muslims had nothing to worry about, for Allah was enough to deal with such deceivers. How? The Almighty Allah would cook up charges against them and then ask Muhammad to either expel them from their homes or have his followers kill them if it would serve His interest. And despite His dislike of lies and treachery, [Cf. Quran, 8:57 et al] Allah had inspired Muhammad to get his followers to use lies and treachery to kill the Jewish poet Kaab B. al-Ashraf who deserved death for ridiculing the Prophet and insulting the Muslim women in his poems. [Ibn Ishaq, pp. 365-67]

Muhammad's Escapes with His Life:

The Battle of Uhud

Meanwhile, the Quraishites of Mecca reacted to their defeat at Badr with embarrassment and astonishment. Several of their bravest and ablest men had fallen to Muhammad's sword, and he further humiliated them by extracting ransom to free the prisoners. They failed to understand how a fugitive recently driven from their midst could overwhelm them in battle and rob them of their pride!

Abu Lahab, Muhammad's uncle and always his staunchest opponent, had been unable to take part in the last battle due to his illness. He died a few days after hearing of the Meccans' rout; his death, it is believed, was hastened by this blow to his spirits.

But the battle tragedy touched no one as much as Abu Sufian. It was one thing to alter his route to reach Mecca safely; it was another to find his home town desolate and hear about the triumph of the man he detested from the core of his heart. He suffered even more agony from the lamentations of his wife Hind, who had lost her father, uncle, and brother to the swords of Hamza and Ali. She now cried out angrily day and night for vengeance at any cost.

In her rage, Hind vowed not to anoint her hair and not to sleep with her husband or any of her lovers until her near and dear ones were avenged. Abu Sufian, likewise, swore not to sleep with his wife or any of his paramours until he had taken revenge for the deaths of the Quraish leaders.

Abu Sufian and Hind had taken these vows following a tribal law of the Arabs, which ordained that whoever shed a man's blood owed his own blood in turn to the slain person's family. Muhammad approved of this ancient barbarous law, for he had said: "Believers, retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed: A free man for a free man, a slave for a slave, and a female for a female." [Q 2:178]

While Abu Sufian was developing plans to raise a Meccan army and attack Muslims, Muhammad set out with 450 men in June of 624 A.D. to raid the tribes of Ghatafan. They received timely warning, however, and moved to safety. Muslims returned home without a fight or spoils. This expedition is known as the Raid of Dhu Amr.

Two months later, Muhammad set out once more with 300 men to raid Bani Sulaim. They reached a place called Bahran and, finding no one, returned to Medina empty-handed again.

The Meccans regularly heard about Muhammad's raids and quivered in fear. While they were still trying to figure out how to contain his growing power, the time came to send their yearly caravan to Syria. Knowing the risk if they followed the conventional path, they decided to send it via Najd, a route that caravans infrequently used, considering it to be safe.

However, information about the caravan bearing toward Najd reached Muhammad, and he planned to seize it before it passed his domain. He gathered a team of 100 brigands headed by his adopted son Zaid, and detailed the mission. The marauders surprised the caravan and captured it at the well of Qadra in Najd. The booty proved extremely rich for Muslims, for a great part of the caravan is said to have been laden with silver.

After the events of Badr and Najd, the Quraishites set up a fund with the aim of building a powerful army. The fund was apparently well subscribed, as ordinary Meccans and merchants alike recognized the serious threat Muslims posed to their livelihoods. They also called upon the men of Bani Kinana who lived on the coastal plains and had a pact of cooperation with them, to help them in their struggle. As was the custom, they asked their eminent poets to join the expeditionary forces to stir up men's ferocity in the battle.

The force left Mecca in 625 A.D. on its way to Medina under the command of Abu Sufian, then the most prominent leader in Mecca. It consisted of approximately 3,000 men, the majority fully equipped for battle. The Meccan army arrived

below the mount called Uhud on a Wednesday and rested there until Thursday.

Meanwhile, news of this massive force reached Muhammad and caused great consternation among Muslims. They held hasty consultations to devise ways to face the threat, Muhammad being inclined to defend the city from within, in order to avoid exposing his troops to the Meccans in an open field.

Many elders, including Abdullah ibn Ubayy, strongly supported Muhammad. All the younger people who had not taken part in the Battle of Badr and hence received none of its pelf, insisted on fighting the enemy in the open. Their demand had its roots in their belief in Muhammad who attributed the victory at Badr to heavenly rather than human strength. They believed that Allah would help them with angels this time too and let them overpower their enemy. Their lesser number was thus of no consequence to them. Nevertheless, Abdullah insisted on remaining within the city and defending it without needless risk to their lives. Muhammad stalled, but finally his young followers became irresistible and he gave in. Donning his armor, he and his troops left the safety of the city to fight his enemy on turf that the latter had chosen to test his strength once again.

On a Saturday morning, Muhammad and his men sighted the enemy. Abdullah ibn Ubayy saw the strength of the Quraish and turned back with 300 of his followers, leaving Muhammad with only 700 Muslims to fight 3,000 Pagans. Undeterred, Muhammad continued his advance, assuring his soldiers that they would receive help from 5,000 angels, provided they all remained firm and acted courageously. In short order, Muhammad found himself facing his antagonists

who were determined to rout him. The Pagans never thought about plundering their defeated enemy and taking slaves from them; this mentality contrasted vividly with that of Muslims who fought all battles to achieve exactly what the Pagans abhorred and avoided!

Though greatly outnumbered, Muhammad drew his men into battle ranks. To combat the mounted Meccans, he placed 50 of his archers on the Muslim flank, with strict orders to repel any attack by the enemy horsemen and on no account to leave their position. He then handed over his standard to Musab ibn Omar and his sword to Abu Dujana with orders to smite the enemy until it bent in his hand.

Both sides now faced each other. By tradition, single combats between valiant warriors on each side opened the contest. When Muslims saw their warriors defeating the Meccan veterans, they rushed forward shouting their war cry "Allah-O-Akbar!" and fell upon the enemy with the same defiant fury that had won them victory at Badr. In the rampant bloodshed that ensued, Muslims, it is said, gained the upper hand when some Pagans took flight. At this juncture, the archers posted on the flank to keep the enemy horsemen at bay allegedly left their station to join the swordsmen in collecting loot from their fleeing foe.

A Meccan cavalryman saw the Muslim archers leave their position. Seizing the opportunity, they swung around and charged the unprotected rear of the Muslim line, which included Muhammad and some of his soldiers. The surprise onslaught created chaos in the Muslim ranks and inspired the Meccans to rally around their war standard and to fight the enemy to the end.

In the pell-mell confusion, a swordsman named Ibn Qamia of Bani Kinana attacked Musab ibn Omar, Muhammad's standard-bearer, and cut him down with a single slash of his sword. Mistaking his victim for Muhammad, Qamia waved his sword over his head and cried, "I have killed Muhammad! Muhammad is dead!"

Muslims, already disoriented by the rearguard attack, panicked at the news of their leader's death and fled. In their haste, they ran right past Muhammad without seeing him. He shouted to them to reunite and fight, but no one noticed. Taking advantage of the disarray, the Meccans moved toward the small group around Muhammad, showering it with arrows and stones from their slings. A rock struck Muhammad's face, knocking out one of his incisors. He also received a blow on his head that knocked him to the ground and fully covered his visage with blood.

Here another miracle-like event is believed to have taken place. As Muhammad lay helpless on the ground, badly wounded, a group of Meccans dashed forward. As willed by Allah, his enemies failed to recognize him and continued on past. This so-called miracle inspires Muslims even today. Indeed, its very mention creates in them a kind of ecstasy, which no man can display in a normal condition.

In fact, the Meccan Pagans did not like to shed blood unnecessarily, especially that of a helpless kindred. Since Muhammad was wounded and was also one of them, and as they were already tired, they did not attack him, thus sparing his life. Had they wished, they could have easily killed him without taking any risk to their own lives.

Once the Meccans passed by, Muhammad got up from the ground and, supported by a small group of his followers, he

hurried up the rocky slopes of Mount Uhud and hid in a hollow.

For the Meccans, the battle was over. They took pride in their victory over Muslims. Before leaving the battlefield, however, Abu Sufian stood at a point opposite the hollow where Muhammad lay concealed and called up to Muslims to ask if, in fact, Muhammad was dead. Omar responded that he was alive and was listening to them at that very moment. Abu Sufian challenged Muslims to meet him the next year at Badr for another round of fighting. He then saddled his camels and horses in preparation for the journey back to Mecca and into the arms of those on whose behalf he had waged and won the battle of Uhud.

Muslims attribute Abu Sufian's lack of desire to kill Muhammad to a miracle, which they claim, Allah caused to save him from sure death. Of course, Allah would have to be a liar to have worked a miracle here, since He had told humanity that He had ceased performing them a long, long time ago. More generally, miracles are mirage beliefs that help believers everywhere hew to their faiths. They are repugnant to science and most philosophy. "For instance," writes Dr. Rafiq Zakaria, "Cicero declared that 'there are no such things as miracles'; they were invented 'for the piety of the ignorant folk.' Celsus said that miracles, whether attributed to Christ or Moses, were 'insufficiently attested and most improbable.'"

But even knowing that miracles always lack a dependable base in evidence, many scholars and scientists, inspired by their religions, have suffered from their tantalizing spell. Even Dr. Zakaria, a Muslim scholar who believes in scientific facts, could not resist his Islamic convictions and sacrificed science at the altar of religion. "The fact that he [Muhammad] won the

battle [of Badr] was, indeed, a miracle," he writes. "That is why he attributed it entirely to God." [*Muhammad and The Quran*, pp. 25, 32]

Why did Abu Sufian really spare Mohammed? The answer may lie in the Pagans' less bloodthirsty nature, the former Pagan Muhammad being an exception. The nomadic Pagans fought wars and battles among themselves for plunder in bad times or for revenge, but they always avoided shedding the blood of their own people. This tribal practice likely prevented Abu Sufian from killing Muhammad. Abu Sufian might also have believed that, in return for granting Muhammad the favor of continued life, Muhammad would abandon his murderous attacks on the Meccan caravans. But, as history shows, this assumption would have been lethally optimistic, for Muhammad continued on his martial path until the entire population of the Peninsula surrendered to his dictatorial authority for no other reason but to save their lives.

How could the defeat at Uhud have happened? To soothe his followers' injured egos, Muhammad attributed it to the Will of Allah. Asked why Allah had not sent 5,000 angels from heaven to help, he said that Allah had essentially lied: "Allah did this [promised the angels] only as good news for you that your hearts might be at rest herein. Victory comes only from Allah, the Mighty, the Wise." In other words, Allah told his followers: *I mentioned the armies of My angels only to calm your hearts, because I know your weakness, yet victory comes only from Me because of My sovereignty and power. Power and authority belong to Me, not to any one of my creatures.*

The statement is clear: Allah had no intention of helping the Muslim fighters, and Muhammad knew it beforehand. Allah promised angelic help only to boost their morale, and they lost

their morale when they wavered before the enemy's onslaught. It did not matter to Allah that Muslims suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of the Pagans, for He intended this failure to teach them a lesson, which would prevent them from making similar mistakes in the future.

Siege against Jews

Muhammad's debacle at the Battle of Uhud diminished his cause for a time among some Arabs and the Jewish tribes. Two months later, a group of tribesmen from the towns of Adhal and Kara came to him requesting that he send missionaries to instruct their people in Islam. He agreed and sent with them six disciples, all well-versed in the faith. When the party was about 30 miles from Mecca, the deceitful deputies fell upon the unsuspecting Muslims, killed four, and carried the other two off to Mecca, where they were sold into the slavery of the Quraish.

The people of Najd allegedly committed similar treachery. Claiming to be Muslims, they sought Muhammad's help in containing their enemies. Acceding to their request, he sent a number of his followers to aid them. Four days out from Medina, the Bani Suliam attacked these Muslim mercenaries and slew them almost to a man.

On his way to Medina, the escapee named Amru ibn Omeya met two unarmed Jews of the Bani Amir, whom he fell upon and killed. The Bani Amir who were at peace with Muhammad called upon him to redress the crime. He referred the matter to the rich Jewish tribe of Bani Nadir for mediation. Its chief invited Muhammad to a meeting, which he attended with several of his followers.

The chief escorted his guests to a meal in an open space of his house. As Muhammad sat down, an angel informed him

that he had been decoyed there to be crushed to death by a millstone to be dropped from the top of the house. Alarmed, Muhammad abruptly left the scene and hurried to Medina without telling anyone the reason for his sudden departure.

Both incidents, though unproven by independent sources, are said to have aroused intense rage in Muhammad. As a result, he ordered the whole tribe of Bani Nadir to leave the country within ten days on pain of death. When they were about to depart, a man named Abdullah persuaded them to stay, promising them his help if Muhammad attacked them. The attack did come, but Jews saw no help from Abdullah. They therefore shut themselves in their castle, where Muhammad besieged them. In a rage, his army cut down the date trees on which the Jews' lives depended.

The beleaguered Jews withstood the siege for six days and then capitulated, as their supplies had run out. Muhammad expelled them from their homes, permitting each of them to carry just a camel-load of their effects, but no weapons. Some found shelter in Syria, while others settled down in Khaybar.

Khaybar was seven days' journey from Medina. It was a strong settlement of Jews, with a number of fortresses for its defense.

Muhammad gained great booty from the eviction of Jews on false pretexts, and he declined to share it with his followers. Instead, he told them of a revelation in which, Allah decreed that any plunder gained without striking a blow was not won by man, but was a gift from Him to Muhammad, for the Prophet to expend as he saw fit. [Q 59:6-7] He conducted other raids during this period, including one against the neighborhood of Tabuk. All yielded rich spoils, much to the delight of the Muslim community, which was then on the

verge of emerging as a most powerful force, destined to change the face of the world forever.

Muhammad's defeat in the Battle of Uhud prompted some Arab tribes to take up arms against him. The Bani Mostalek was one of them. Learning through his intelligence web of its warlike preparations, he immediately took to the ground where his enemy was gathering. Muhammad was leading a force of his disciples, followed by a contingent of Khazrajites headed by their chief Abdullah ibn Ubayy.

The rapid mobilization of the Muslim forces surprised the enemy, and in the confusion that befell the camp of Bani Mostalek, its leader Prince al-Harith was killed very early in the combat, causing his troops to take to their heels. Muhammad came away with 200 prisoners, 5,000 sheep, and 1,000 camels as the spoils of victory.

Showdown: The Battle of the Trench

After the Battle of Uhud, the Meccans under the leadership of Abu Sufian continued to build up their strength to engage Muhammad in a final battle. With this aim in mind, they also formed a confederacy with the Ghatafan and other desert tribes. Jews of the tribe of an-Nadir, whom Muhammad expelled from Medina, joined the confederacy as well. Ultimately, the Meccans are said to have raised an army of 10,000 strong, all ready to march on Medina, seize it, and scotch Muhammad and his followers forever from the face of the earth.

Muhammad, as usual, got early news of the impending attack, but in this case the informer was none than Allah Himself. He hastily gathered a force of about 3,000 warriors. Knowing the size of the enemy and remembering his defeat in

the open at Uhud, this time he decided to defend Medina from within its walls.

During preparations, Salman the Persian, whom we have met earlier, suggested to Muhammad a unique defense he had seen the Persians use: A moat at some distance outside the walls. Such a trench hampered enemies in launching attacks on the cities. The moat defense being unheard of in Arabia, Muhammad adopted it instantly. Setting a large number of men to dig the moat, he himself is said to have contributed his own labor, hoping to motivate his followers to complete it before the enemy arrived.

Throughout the digging of the trench, a number of miracles are claimed to have taken place. In one, Muhammad fed a large number of people from a single basket of dates, which remained full even after satisfying all. In another, he is said to have fed 1,000 men at a feast with a lamb and a loaf of bread with enough remaining to entertain numerous workers digging the moat. Muslims believe in these miracles, as Jesus Christ had performed similar ones to convince men of his divine power.

Another wonder is also believed to have occurred during the excavation of the moat. As Muhammad struck rocks with his hammer, they emitted fabulous sparks. One illuminated all of the Yemen, a second brightened the imperial palace of Constantinople, and a third lit the towers of the royal palace of Persia. These were, according to him, portents from heaven, representing the future conquests of Islam.

In fact, all these miracles are later inventions of Muslims. He never claimed he could cause any miracle, and Allah said He had ceased performing them because people no longer believed them, the latter a claim that Muslims themselves have

proven false. To Muhammad, the Quran was his miracle — a claim the Pagans never believed and repeatedly ridiculed it to his face.

Workers had just finished the moat when the Meccans arrived and found themselves facing the strange barrier Muslims had dug. Perplexed, they laid siege to the settlement from across the ditch. Muhammad, with 3,000 of his men, stayed behind the wall, contemplating how to avoid a second humiliation from the Pagans now gathered at the doors of his sanctuary. The siege continued, with some bloody skirmishes now and then taking place between individuals on each side.

While the siege lingered on, spies brought word to Muhammad that the Jewish tribe of Quraiza, which had a strong fort near the city, would join the Meccans against him. This information caused Muhammad great agitation. Allah had His opinions on the matter and He told Muhammad:

8:55: "*For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are those who reject Him: They will not believe.*"

8:56: "*They are those with whom thou didst make a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they have not the fear of (Allah*)."

8:57: "*If ye gain mastery over them in war, disperse them, those who follow them, that they may remember.*"

8:58: "*If thou fearest treachery from any group, throw back (their covenant) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms: For Allah loveth not the treacherous.*"

Humans can commit a wide variety of horrifying crimes. Whom does Allah find most horrifying? Who are the "worst of beasts"? It is not, say, serial killers. It is not genocidal dictators

like Hitler. It is people who do not believe in Himand His Prophet.

And specifically the "worst of beasts in the sight of Allah" were Jews of Bani Quraiza. The speaker of this verse was clearly not the same Allah or God that Jews and the Christians worship. That God, for Muhammad, was in the past. The Allah of Muslims despised the past and despises Jews even today, for the reason that they had not only refused to obey Muhammad, but had also allegedly tried to kill him through treachery and deception!

Verse 8:56 indicates that Muhammad had made a covenant with Bani Quraiza without Allah's approval. When Allah learned of it, He mildly scolded the Prophet for making an agreement with a people who allegedly broke covenants repeatedly, since they lacked a morally salubrious fear of Him. Therefore, He ordered the Prophet to disperse them and their followers from their homes if he gained mastery over them in war, to set an example for others.

Allah also ordered the Prophet to breach his own covenants with any group if he suspected breach from the other side, since He finds treachery odious. That is, suspicion alone justified Muhammad in breaking his word to others. We have no word whether Allah approved of others breaking their word to Muhammad for the same reason.

But what were the terms of the covenant with the Bani Quraiza, and had they actually consented to them? Our search for the text of the covenant produced no result, a fact that strongly indicates to us that there existed no written covenant between Muhammad and the Bani Quraiza tribe. Could it be that, as with his so-called Constitution of Medina, he unilaterally contrived a covenant, which required Bani

Quraiza to accept him as a Prophet of Allah and stand on his side against the Meccans who had lain siege to the city of Medina?

We cannot rule out such a possibility, for we note that Muhammad had always found a *casus belli* to justify his actions.

In any case, he began plotting to diffuse the threat of a united foe. And the scheme he came up with rivals anything in modern warfare for treachery. He sent a man called Nuaim ibn Masood of the tribe of Ghatafan to secretly visit the camps of the confederates and sow dissension among them. Accordingly, he went to the leaders of Quraiza and told them they were fools to support the Quraishites. Why? If they lost, he said, the Quraishites would simply retreat to Mecca and be secure. Their other allies would also retire to distant homes. Only they themselves would face Muhammad's wrath. So adopting the role of the fiend Iblis (the name the Quran gives to Satan), Nuaim advised them not to make common cause with the Quraishites unless they gave them hostages as surety toward their own participation in the struggle to break Muhammad's power for good.

Thus cultivating the seed of discord in the minds of Bani Quraiza leaders, Nuaim went to the Quraishites and the tribe of Ghatafan, and warned them not to trust Jews of Quraiza. This tribe, he informed them, intended to acquire hostages from them, only to turn them over to Muslims to gain advantage for themselves.

Thus artfully laid, the trap worked almost at once. On Friday evening Abu Sufian sent word to the Quraiza leaders to join them the next morning in a general assault on Muslims. Jews refused, telling the Quraishites that Saturday was their

Sabbath and their religion forbade all hostilities on that day. They also said they would not take part in any future battle unless the Quraishites gave them hostages to guarantee their own commitment. Since both the Quraishites and the Ghatafanites found truth in what Nuaim had told them, they dared not launch their planned attack on the entrenched Muslims.

The siege continued for a month with no sign that the besieged were planning to come out of their shelter and engage the great Meccan army in a fight. Under the circumstance, the Meccans simply had to wait, idle in their camps. Eventually, a cold storm, along with rain and a sweeping blast of wind, fell upon them. It tore up their tents and extinguished their campfire, and thus the Meccan Pagans found themselves exposed to the bitter chill and the hazards of the desert. At this moment of distress, they learned that Muhammad was about to fall upon them with his forces. Panic and confusion engulfed the Meccans. Failing to restore calm to his forces, Abu Sufian mounted his camel and ordered them to retreat.

Desert Pogrom

With the menacing confederates gone, Muhammad took revenge on Bani Quraiza. In it, angel Gabriel played a major role. The following Hadith tells us: "*Narrated Aisha: When Allah's Apostle returned on the day (of the battle) of Al-Khandaq (i.e., the Trench), he put down his arms and took a bath. Then Gabriel, whose head was covered with dust, came to him saying, 'You have put down your arms! By Allah, I have not put down my arms yet.' Allah's Apostle said, 'Where (to go now)?' Gabriel said, 'This way,' pointing towards the tribe of Bani Quraiza. So Allah's Apostle went out towards them.*" [Bukhari, vol. 4, book 52, no. 68]

Unable to protect themselves from the huge Muslim onslaught, the Quraizites shut themselves in their castle and withstood a siege for many days. At last, famine overtook them and they gave up, soliciting the intercession of their old friends and protectors, the Ausites. The leaders of the latter implored Muhammad to grant mercy to Jews under the same terms he had given to the tribe of Qaynuqa. He hesitated for a while. Then, in a show of acquiescence, he left their fate to the judgment of Saad ibn Moad, the Ausite chief, who he well knew harbored ill will toward the Bani Quraiza.

Saad's animosity originated from the recent hostilities at the moat, where he sustained an injury so serious he did not expect to recover. He held the Quraizite Jews responsible for his impending death, and he longed to smite them before leaving this world. Fate and Muhammad gave him his opportunity.

The Quraizites knew nothing about the ill feeling Saad nurtured against them. In fact, they were elated at his selection, for he had been their friend and they expected his decision to be in their favor. They were dead wrong.

Brought with much difficulty to the site of judgment, Saad demanded that the unsuspecting Jews swear an oath to abide by his ruling. As soon as they did, he sentenced all the men to death and their women and children to slavery, and ordered their properties confiscated by Muslims.

Jews were dumbfounded, but there was no chance of an appeal. Following the verdict, Muslims herded the Quraizite men in chains to a place in Medina, since called the Market of the Quraizites, with open graves dug well in advance to receive their dead bodies. Then Muhammad struck off their

heads in those trenches, as they were brought out to him in batches.

The butchery lasted an entire day, and about 600 or 700 Jews, and perhaps as many as 800 or 900, lost their lives to the bloody sword of the Prophet of Peace. The majority of the Jewish men thus murdered, no major hurdle remained to prevent Muhammad from becoming a Man of Sword. The sword later became an emblem of Islam. [See the flag of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] The massacre was followed by the seizure of a huge quantity of goods, which included camels, flocks, and herds. Each foot soldier had one lot, each horseman, three: Two for his horse and one for himself. Muhammad and Allah received a fifth of the whole. How much Muhammad gave to Allah and how He enjoyed His share is unfortunately not mentioned in the Quran.

Seizing the Khaybar Moneypot

These successful raids against Jews made Muhammad a rich man in a very short time. He owned several date-palm fields and orchards,1 which originally belonged to Jews. He could now acquire all the arms he needed for his fighters, and fill his harem with a host of women. Simultaneously, his followers saw a change in their lifestyles. Their indebtedness to Jews disappeared; instead of being at their beck and call, they now enjoyed a carefree life, dwelling in the comfort of their former masters' homes. As they savored the rewards of their murderous adventures, their leader gave fresh encouragement to their propensity.

Having himself drawn immense benefits from Jews in the past, he announced his intention to launch new excursions against the ones who still remained outside his domain.

Muhammad's total power over most Medinese now turned him into a complete tyrant. He decreed that the Pagans who had not yet accepted Islam should convert forthwith or face stiff punishments from him. Although we do not know how many offending Pagans he penalized, we can gain a sense of his severity from two verses of the Quran that his associates left behind for us to read in it. They say:

"*They swear by Allah that they are indeed of you; but they are not of you, yet they are afraid (to appear in their true colors). If they could find a place to flee to, or caves, or a place of concealment, they would turn straightway thereto, with an obstinate rush.*" [Cf. R.V.C. Bodley, *op. cit*. p. 229]

These sentences reveal Muhammad's ferocious nature, which he showed to the Pagans who dared conceal their true religious inclination from him. He plainly treated his enemies brutally.

By the time the wealthy, powerful Prophet entered the sixth year after his migration to Medina, he was longing to visit his home town and link it to his religion. Mecca was sacred to Arabs and its alienation from him was retarding the spread of his faith. He decided to visit Mecca and perform his *Umra*, the lesser pilgrimage Muslims can carry out any time of the year. Accompanied by many followers, he set out for Mecca in the month of Dhu al-Qaada, which preceded that of the greater pilgrimage. Both were months of peace. He brought 70 camels for sacrifice at the ancient, idolatrous temple of the Ka'aba, where the old Pagan rites had undergone no change whatsoever. Muhammad knew that the news of his approach would cause a stir among the Meccans, so he donned the conventional garb of a pilgrim and had all the beasts garlanded to demonstrate his good intentions.

His efforts went in vain, however. A confused rumor of his coming reached the Meccans. Suspecting a foul ploy, they sent a powerful force to take position in a valley about two days from Mecca and check the Muslims' advance.

Muhammad heard of the Meccans' reaction and detoured from his original track. Taking a difficult route through the mountain defiles, he reached the plains near Mecca and pitched his tents at a place called Hudaybiyya, considered within the sacred precincts of Mecca. He then sent his assurances of peaceful aims to the Meccans and sought the rights of pilgrimage from them.

Envoys moved to and fro, but the Meccan Pagans remained determined to prevent Muslims, whom they deemed apostates, from entering the holy shrine of the Ka'aba to perform their Umra. After protracted negotiations, both parties reached an agreement, called the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. The pact included a term, which required Muslims to return at once to Medina this time. However, it permitted them to perform their Umra the following year and to remain in Mecca for three days before withdrawing to Medina. Muslims returned home, dejected at being unable to perform their sacred rites at the Ka'aba. But Muhammad consoled and cheered them with the prospect of fulfilling their wishes the following year in a befitting manner.

Discontentment and depression, nonetheless, prevailed among many of Muhammad's followers. To lift these burdens, he conceived of an expedition that he knew would not only make them forget the humiliation of Hudaybiyya, but gratify their love of plunder by seizing a trove of booty from the tribe he had plotted to raid.

Some 75 miles north of Medina lay the city of Khaybar, inhabited by Jews who had grown prosperous through commerce and agriculture. Grain grew in one section of their fields, dotted with palm groves; the other part was pasture, rich with flocks and herds and guarded by several forts and a citadel. Khaybar had become a sanctuary for Jews whom Muhammad had uprooted from their homes around Medina and forced to flee at threat to their lives. Moreover, the settlement's wealth made it an appealing prey in the war Muhammad had declared against all enemies of Allah.

In 629 A.D., Muhammad collected a force of 1,200 foot soldiers and a cavalry of 200 horsemen, and set out for Khaybar with the goal of obliterating its Jews. On arrival, Muslims assailed the smaller forts outside the city. Their defenders gave in to the marauders without resistance. The huge booty captured from these castles became "gifts from Allah" to Muhammad alone, as previously decreed by the generous and all-knowing Allah.

Muhammad next launched his attack on the city of Khaybar itself. Its ruler had deemed the town impregnable, with its strong forts and citadel, and had made it the depository for all his treasure. It was well defended too. In the face of a ferocious Muslim onslaught, its residents offered stiff resistance and repulsed every assault. For a long time none of the numerous fortifications fell to Muslims, yet they still exerted pressure on the defending Jews. At length, the invaders gained the upper hand and captured all but two of the forts and the citadel. Thereafter, Muslims set up a siege on the remaining forts. It lasted 14 days, during which Muhammad reportedly devoted most of his time to prayer.

He is believed to have chosen a rock at a place of worship and made seven daily circuits around it, in a ritual similar to circling the Ka'aba — a Pagan practice he still followed, despite his preaching to the contrary. In time, his followers are believed to have erected a mosque at this site to preserve its sanctity as well as to commemorate what he had done to the rock.

When the siege exhausted the Jews, Muhammad launched a determined attack aimed at flushing out his victims from their fortresses. The brute force had its effect and Jews surrendered to the soldiers of Allah.

Their capitulation gave the victors vast booty, the richest Allah had as yet bestowed upon them. Each of Allah's soldiers got enough to live on for life, and Muhammad's treasure trove also grew immensely richer. As a result, he no longer had to look to others to finance his future war efforts. Moreover, the capture of Khaybar proved an ongoing boon for him. In the future, this oasis would pay half its annual produce to Muslims, affording them a permanent income for the first time in their lives.

While still amid the vanquished Jews, Muhammad felt hungry and asked for food. They laid out the shoulder of a lamb before him, and he took a mouthful. But then the meat itself told him it was poisoned, and he spat it out before consuming any of it. A companion of his, the story goes, died instantly after swallowing a morsel. Muhammad later suffered an illness for three years before his death, and he attributed its agonies to this Jewish assassination attempt, despite the fact he had not eaten a bit of the poisoned meat.

Some modern writers contend that Muslims put the Jews to death after their surrender, perhaps in revenge for trying to poison Muhammad.

After dividing the spoils, Muhammad moved on and, without a blow, took the Wadi al-Qura, a smaller nearby oasis also inhabited by Jews. Many more expeditions followed under the able leadership of his disciples, all of whom proved immensely effective in bringing rebellious tribes under the dominion of their leader.

The Swelling Seraglio

Despite all the progress humanity has made thus far, all societies on earth remain under men's dominance in one way or another. The pattern is more pronounced in the East, where a proverb says: "Behind every successful man, there is a woman." The word "woman" here strictly denotes a "woman," but not a wife, mother, sister or a daughter. In other words, it is a woman who has a relationship with a man outside the marriage. Hence, the proverb does not apply to monogamous men, though many achieved stellar successes with the whole-hearted encouragement, help, and cooperation of their wives and other female relatives.

A promiscuous man in the East and elsewhere may have many women in his life, but he traditionally bestows wifehood only on just one. He does so to divide the role of his women in two categories: The wife, who must bear his children and look after his household affairs, and the girlfriend, paramour, or concubine who does not have to perform these duties.

The scheme of obligations is reciprocal in many ways. Most promiscuous men have much less responsibility towards girlfriends or concubines than to their wedded or "contracted" wives. As such, men who are not fully committed to their girl

friends and concubines feel much relaxed and comfortable in their company. Their rendezvous often take place in a congenial atmosphere unburdened by the usual household concerns. Because most men do not like their girlfriends and concubines to bear children, their encounters remain free from child-related discussions. Consequently, many men prefer the company of their girlfriends or concubines to that of their wives.

There is another group of men who marry multiple women for political ends. For instance, Emperor Akbar is said to have married no less than 5,000 women [*India Journal*, p. D20] from different Indian communities to extend his sway over the areas his wives came from. This policy paid a high dividend: He ruled India longer and more effectively than any other Mogul emperor.

There is a third group of men who take numerous women — as wives, girlfriends, or concubines — to compensate for their psychological deficiencies, among other reasons. These men lacked physical affection such as patting in childhood, especially from their mothers, and to recoup it they collect a large number of women to pat them in their adult life. If they leave this necessity unfulfilled, scientific findings tell us, many of them will find themselves in disadvantageous situations later in life. [Thomas A. Harris, in his book, *I'm OK, You're OK*]

The fourth group of men whose number is not huge collects an assortment of women as wives, girlfriends, or concubines to fulfill their sadistic desires. They derive immense pleasure from inflicting sexual, physical, and financial torments on them. The sexual torment consists not only of overindulgence in violent sex with them, but also of denying them sexual gratification and the pleasure of motherhood.

Muhammad belonged partly to the third and fully to the fourth group. His mother abandoned him when he was five, and the women in the homes of his childhood and youth not only refused to give him affection, but mistreated him on account of his Allah given misfortunes.

As a result, Muhammad took numerous wives, treated them badly, and issued commandments, as those we have noted earlier, intended to degrade and injure them and all other women on earth. Our discussion of Muhammad's conjugal life will examine these issues.

Muhammad definitely had a sensual side, and he loved three things: Women, scents and food. [R.V.C. Bodley, *op. cit*. p. 229] Ibn Ishaq mentions a dialogue between Muhammad and a certain Jabir ibn Abdullah, told in the latter's voice:

"I went out with the Apostle on the raid of Dhar al Riqa at Nakhla on a feeble old camel of mine. On the way back, the company kept going on ahead while I dropped further behind until the Apostle rode up to me and asked me what the trouble was. I told him that my camel was keeping me back and he told me to make it kneel. I did so and the Apostle made his camel to kneel and said, "Give me this stick you are holding" . . . He took it and prodded the beast a few times. Then he told me to remount and off we went. By Him who sent him with the truth, my old camel kept up with the rapid pace of his camel.

"As we were talking, the Apostle asked me if I would sell him my camel. I said that I would give it to him but he insisted on buying it, so I asked him to make me an offer. He said he would give me a dirham. I refused and said that it would be cheating me. Then he offered two dirham and I still refused and the Apostle went on raising his offer until it amounted to an ounce of gold. When I asked him if he was really satisfied, he said he was and I said that the camel was his.

"Then he asked me if I were married; then was she a virgin or a woman previously married. I told him she had been married before and he said, "No young girl so that you could sport together!"

Like Jews, Muhammad placed paramount importance on female virginity. Following the Torah, he forbade sex before marriage. Women who engaged in pre-marital sex and lost their virginity are generally to be flogged 100 times. For adultery, women may be stoned to death. Muslim men usually escape punishment by virtue of the innate advantages Allah granted them.

We cannot determine with certainty how many wives Muhammad took. Conservative writers limit the number to 15, though estimates range as high as 25. [Washington Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 197] Ali Dashti, an Iranian scholar of our time, has named 21 women who he says were Muhammad's wives. [*Twenty-three Years*, pp. 123-125]

Muhammad's **first wife** was of course Khadija who died in 619 A.D. He took his second in 620 A.D., when he was 50, and married his last wife two years before he died in 632 A.D.

Second Wife: Sawda. After returning to Mecca from Taif, Muhammad married Sawda. He was then facing acute financial hardship with the death of Khadija and desperately needed help until he found a permanent solution to his economic woes.

Sawda was a widow of Sokran who had left behind some wealth for her to live out her life on. She was neither young nor beautiful. Moreover, she was very tall for a woman and excessively corpulent. Despite her physical shortcomings, Muhammad went ahead and married her, perhaps because either:

1. He had lost his ability to engage in penile intercourse, so Sawda's age, bulk, and ugliness worked to his advantage. He could hide his weakness by claiming that her unattractiveness prevented him from having sex with her.

2. All that he wanted from her was her money.

What evidence do we have for Muhammad's impotency? He is said to have had six children with Khadija. Three were boys and they died in infancy. After Khadija's death, he took at least 14 wives. Almost all of them were of childbearing age, yet none bore him a child. In our judgment, his erectile dysfunction prevented his wives from conceiving and enjoying the pleasures of motherhood.

Muhammad's impotency has always been a well-guarded secret. He helped prevent it from ever becoming a public knowledge by forbidding his followers from marrying his wives after his death. His sycophantic adherents forever buried his embarrassing condition by including his slave-girls and concubines in that prohibition. [Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *op. cit*. pp. 1088-9] (We shall address the question of whether he had a son by Maria Qibtia below.)

Once Sawda had served his purposes, Muhammad told her he planned to expel her from his house, because of her unattractiveness. Faced with the prospect of starvation and death on the street, she implored him to reconsider his decision, no doubt pledging not to reveal the state of his sexual health. Satisfied with the bargain, he allowed her to live in his house for the remainder of her life.

Third Wife: Aisha. Aisha was the toddler child of Abdullah ibn Abu Kahafa alias Abu Bakr, the future Caliph of Islam. Since Muhammad was a good friend of her father, he could see her whenever he wished. In course of his frequent

visits, Aisha became accustomed to him, and she said later that his presence brought to her "something of the joy of the Paradise." In his "miraculous touch, the sensation of joy," the child stated, "was even tangible." We believe Muhammad had become infatuated with the child Aisha over a period of time, and saw no wrong in developing a sexual relationship with her. At first he would have used threats to control the child. Slowly her whole self became suffused by the fears of retaliation he planted in her tender mind, along with the "sensation of joy" that his "touch" gave her, and she refrained from divulging to her parents or anyone else what Muhammad had been doing to her for a long time.

Her parents might have sensed the true relation between their child and the elderly Muhammad, and they also might have made her confess it to them, but his strong influence over them as well as their own ambitions would have prevented them from taking action against the molester of their daughter.

Eventually, Muhammad found it difficult to live without being able to "play with her and she with him." This confession has led other writers to infer that he had a physical relationship with Aisha long before she became his wife. Fed up with the secrecy and fear that accompanied the satisfaction of his unnatural lust, he decided to marry Aisha when she was hardly six years old.

Arabian traditions permitted child marriage, but the union of such a young girl with a man over 50 was not too common. To overcome people's criticism and contempt of him — especially since he claimed that he was a prophet of Allah, sent by Him to remove all the ills in societies of men and Jinns — Muhammad devised a brilliant idea. It was a dream, which

he used to justify his otherwise unpardonable marriage to a child.

One day, he told his followers who were his obedient servants that he had a dream in which he saw a man carrying someone wrapped in a piece of silk. [Q 39:53. Also see Maududi's comment on this verse]. The man said to him, "*This is thy wife; so uncover her.*" He lifted the silk and, lo! There was Aisha." Inadvertently, Muhammad may have left us a clue to Aisha's real age when he developed his sexual infatuation for her: She was a baby in her cradle; hence the man in his dream was able to carry her in his hand!

Muhammad publicly interpreted the dream as a divine command to marry the child, and hence he did. The betrothal removed his difficulty in engaging the child in acts that gratified his sexual fantasies. To close the mouths of his critics, he also permitted them to marry girl children if they needed them to satisfy their lust. [Cf. Q 65:4]

Following the marriage, Muhammad's non-penile sexual relationship with Aisha continued for over two years. It had a brief break when he migrated to Medina. Within a year, Aisha also moved to Medina along with her family members. Soon after her arrival, Muhammad formalized his marriage, and took Aisha to his house. Aisha was nine and her husband 53 when he supposedly consummated his marriage with her!

The youth of the bride notwithstanding, Muslim writers maintain that Muhammad married Aisha because she was clever and learned, [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *op. cit*., vol.2, p. 1113] He had judged her qualities with his prophetic eyes. Convinced of her extraordinary qualities, he decided to marry and equip her with his teachings, which he expected her to convey to Muslims after his death.

Because Muhammad placed his complete trust in her, she is universally referred to as *Ummul Momenin*, the mother of the Believers. Most Muslim theologians and scholars, as well as their ordinary contemporaries, consider her an authority not only on Hadiths, but also on the details of her husband's entire life.

Uncertain how a six-year-old could become a learned person in an environment with no facilities for imparting education at all, we assert that Muhammad had only one reason for marrying Aisha: To fulfill his lascivious desires. Her presumed intelligence and scholarship played no role whatever.

After she grew up, we believe, Aisha not only resented her childhood marriage to Muhammad, but scorned him for his inability to satisfy her sexual needs, as he used to do to her "something with his hand." [Hadith of Abu Dawood; vol. 3:4880, p. 1364] The fact that she supported his fourth wife Hafsah in her confrontation with him on a supposedly sex-related issue lends support to our theory. [Q 66:4] She stood on Hafsah's side to vent her anger at what he had done to her in her childhood, as well as what she was then going through in her sex life.

For so long as Muhammad and other stalwarts of Islam lived, she dared not revolt against those who supported all the misdeeds of her husband. But Ali's assumption of the Caliphate gave her the chance. She revolted against him and fought a pitched battle against the Muslim forces. Though defeated, many believe she caused more trouble among Muslims than all the Pagan Quraishites combined. For instance, one scholar makes the point explicitly in scoring Aisha for her alleged misdeeds:

"…Aisha, child in years though she was, was no helpless infant abandoned to the mercy of a licentious old gentleman. If ever a young lady knew what she was about, it was the large-eyed, tiny-footed, curly haired Aisha bint Abi Bakr. From the day she established herself in that mosque harem, she ran it. She treated old Sawda like a kind of maid of all work. When other wives were imported, she continued to have the biggest say in all domestic matters. When Mohammed strayed, she did not relax her hold. She knew that he would always come back to her. She did things in that harem against all the principles of Islam and to the deep disapproval of her father. After Mohammed's death, she did more to raise trouble among Moslems than any Meccan Koreishite. She had a fiery, headstrong, irresponsible, egocentric nature, and if she had not been a Moslem might have become another Zenobia or Theodora. That she did not meet a violent death was partly due to good luck and partly to the loyalty of her husband's successors, who, much as they felt that all she deserved was a javelin through one of her pretty breasts, defended her for old association's sake. I have no compassion for Aisha being left at the age of ten on the lap of her husband over fifty."

Imagine a nine- or ten-year-old girl taking control of a harem, inhabited by much older and experienced women, and imposing her will on them! Servitude or submission (the literal meaning of Islam), has shaped such wild fancies. But unsatisfied with his accusations against Aisha, this inhuman scholar assumed the role of a pimp-like apologist for his beloved Prophet and condoned her molestation by him, saying: "He was a good man, a kind man, an honest man whose love life up to that point had been little more than a formal ceremony. He deserved something young and fresh to make up for what he had missed. That he did get a great deal out of his marriage is probable, but it was due to Aisha wishing it." [R.V.C. Bodley, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-47]

Again we ask: Could a nine- or ten-year-old girl have knowingly offered herself to a fifty-plus-year old man so that he, through her young and fresh body, could make up for what he had missed even if 'his touch gave her a sensation of joy'? In our opinion, no sane person could ever have conceived such an absurd idea unless he were a Muslim and the slave of a pedophile Prophet!

Fourth Wife: Hafsah. Hafsah was the daughter of Omar, an intimate friend and a close confidant of Muhammad. Omar would become the second Caliph of Islam after the death of Abu Bakr.

Hafsah had married Kunays, but became a widow at 18. Her father offered her in marriage to Othman, the widowed son-in-law of Muhammad, but he rejected her. Omar then offered her to Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, who responded to the offer in an evasive manner that hurt Omar's pride.

Finding no willing groom, Omar went to Muhammad to seek his advice as well as to vent his anger at Othman and Abu Bakr. Counseling patience, he told Omar that he would give him a better son-in-law than Othman, and give Othman a better father-in-law than him (Omar).

Sometime later, Muhammad gave his daughter Umm Kulthum in marriage to Othman, and he himself married Hafsah, thus fulfilling his promise to Omar. Afterwards, Abu Bakr explained his evasiveness to Omar by divulging the secret: Muhammad himself wished to marry Hafsah, so he had to speak carefully when Omar made the offer. Had Abu Bakr accepted it, he would have upset Muhammad — a development that would not have helped him or his ambitions.

Fifth Wife: Zainab. Zainab was the daughter of Khuzaima and wife of Ubaydah. She became a widow when her husband was killed at the Battle of Badr (some say the Battle of Uhud). She was rich and had a giving disposition. Her generosity had earned her the title of "the mother of the poor." She died few years after her marriage with Muhammad.

Muslims claim that Muhammad married Zainab because her husband had been killed in battle and she needed a man to look after her. This explanation hardly seems sufficient. Eight Muslim men died at the Battle of Badr. In the Battle of Uhud, 65 Muslim men, including his uncle Hamza, were killed. We do not know if all of them were married. But if we assume, for argument's sake, that only two martyrs in total were married, they left at least two widows behind them.

So if Muhammad married one of them, what happened to the other? Islamic history does not tell us that any of the Muslim stalwarts of Muhammad's time had married or given shelter to those women who had lost their husbands at Badr or Uhud or any other battle they fought for Islam.

The truth is: Muhammad had no compassion for women, widowed or otherwise. He simply hated them from the core of his heart. He took so many wives, attracted by their beauty, [Q 33:52] merely to satisfy his sadistic desires, which had become an uncontrollable problem for him. The Quran itself talks about this fact. [Verse 33:50. Allah permitted Muhammad to gather in his harem as many women as was possible for him "in order that there should be no difficulty" for him. What difficulty he had is not mentioned in the Quran.]

The facts above clearly demonstrate that Muhammad married Zainab either for her wealth or for her youth and

beauty in order to satisfy his beastly lust. His alleged piety played no role in this marriage or any other in his life.

Sixth Wife: Umm Salama. Umm Salama, whose real name was Hind, was the daughter of Abu Ummaya. She had a son called Salama, hence the appellation Umm Salama or "Mother of Salama." Four months after her husband's death, Muhammad asked her to marry him. Though no more than 28, she declined on the grounds that she was too old for him and that she had a jealous nature, which would disrupt his conjugal life. In addition to his wives, Muhammad at this time had a number of slave girls in his harem. [N. J. Dawood in the Koran, p. 297] He had Allah's permission to swap his slave-girls for young and beautiful ones whenever he pleased. [Quran, 33:52]

Umm Salama married Muhammad after he assured her that her age was not a factor and that he would have Allah cure her jealous nature soon after their union. However, history does not tell us if her character ever changed during her life with Muhammad.

Seventh Wife: The Second Zainab. She was one of Muhammad's cousins. After the death of Khadija in 619 A.D, he wanted to have a sexual relationship with her. A daughter of the Quraish tribe, she was young and very beautiful. Though the child of a poor family, she had an aristocratic demeanor and conducted herself in a manner befitting the traditions of her tribe.

But as the Pagans were already mocking Muhammad for the unethical teachings of his religion, he was afraid a sexual liaison with Zainab without marrying her would infuriate them further. (Later, when Muhammad became more

powerful, Allah explicitly granted him the privilege of having sex with his cousins.)

He therefore approached her mother, Umimah bint Abdul Mutallib and her brother, Abdullah ibn Jash, and sought her hand in marriage. Despite their conversion to Islam, they declined because Zainab was too young to marry a man of his age and because he was not in a position to pay them the dowers they were expecting. Their refusal hurt him badly, and he vowed to avenge the insult they unintentionally inflicted on him.

By the end of the seventh year of his migration (*Hijrah*) to Medina, Muhammad had gathered four women in his *harem* to meet his sexual demands: Sawda, Aisha, Hafsah and Umm Salama. He was now in a position to humiliate Zainab and her family members for refusing to marry her off to him. To do so, he drew up an elaborate scheme. His scheme required his freedman Zaid to divorce his wife and marry Zainab instead, thereby lowering her esteem in the eyes of people, as tradition did not allow male slaves — former or current — to marry free women. It also required Zaid to divorce Zainab soon after the marriage. Made an outcast by her marriage and divorce, Zainab would then have no man to marry her, and she would have to accept whatever status Muhammad or anyone else might bestow on her.

But Muhammad faced a number of stumbling blocks in realizing his scheme:

1) *Social taboo*. The Pagans did not approve a marriage between an adoptive father and the divorced wife of his adopted son.

2) *The wishes of Zainab's family members*. They did not consider Zaid the best of catches.

3) *His own earlier pronouncement*. He had declared that a man could not have more than four wives at a time. [Q 4:3]

4) *His ambitions*. His ascent to power was not yet complete, and he needed more time to become the absolute ruler of the Islamic state he dreamed of establishing in the Peninsula of the Arabs.

These concerns all weighed heavily on Muhammad's mind. He worried that if he brought Zainab straight into his harem, the Pagans, Unbelievers, and the hypocrites would raise a huge hue and cry, thus making his ambition to become the undisputed ruler of his yet-to-be-founded state much harder.

But Allah did not care about the ancient traditions and feelings of the Arabs, so He encouraged Muhammad to go ahead and implement his plan against Zainab. Being a careful man, he may have seriously brooded on the negative consequences of Allah's encouragement, knowing well the scheme could land him in serious difficulty. But in the end his bestial nature prevailed and he went ahead to avenge the insult he had suffered at the hands of Zainab's mother and brother.

First, he had to invalidate the Arabs' prohibition against an adoptive father marrying his adopted son's divorced wife. Hence, he had Allah declare:

33:4**:** "*Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his (one) body: Nor has He made your wives whom you divorce by Zihar your mothers: Nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. Such is (only) your (manner of) speech by your mouths. But Allah tells (you) the Truth, and He shows the (right) Way.*"

"*Nor has He made your adopted sons your sons*" meant: An adopted son was not really a son of his adoptive father, and

therefore the Arabs' prohibition was null and void. *Zihar* was the Pagan custom through which husbands divorced their wives, and granted them motherly status. After a husband declared that his wife was like his mother, she could not demand conjugal rights from him, nor was she free to marry another man in place of him. Without declaring *Zihar* an obnoxious practice, Allah — speaking through the lust-filled mind and compelling voice of Muhammad — laid down rules to restrict adoption in Islam, and this He needed to do to demolish the Pagans' restrictions on the adoptive fathers. Without abolishing *Zihar*, as it was a moot item for Him, Allah alias Muhammad declared:

33:5: "*Call them by (the names of) their fathers: That is juster in the sight of Allah. But if ye know not their father's (names, call them) your Brothers in faith, or your Maulas. But there is no blame on you if ye make a mistake therein: (What counts is) the intention of your hearts: And Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful*."

Allah was categorical on the naming of adopted children. He told Muslims that instead of giving their adopted sons their own names, they must call them by the names of their fathers, and if they did not know their fathers' names, they should call them brothers-in-faith or *Maulas*. In no case should adoptive Muslim men give their own names to their adopted children!

Allah's terms on adoption are not only inhuman; they are nonsensical and impractical. Here is why.

In 2004, about 225,000 people perished in the tsunamis that devastated Aceh, a Sharia Law ruled island of Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country on earth, as well as parts of many non-Muslim countries. Allah approved this havoc, as "no calamity can occur but by His leave." [Q 64:11] Many

infants survived, but they had no one to take care of them. Some of these orphans found shelter in charitable care-centers, while others gained homes with kind and loving people from all over the world.

Suppose a Muslim man adopted one of the male infants, and he did not know his father's name, nor the infant couldn't give him his father's. In such a situation, what was the man, unlike the men of other faiths, required to do and not to do?

He could not give him his own name, in order to avoid the appearance of a father-and son relationship. Nor could he call him a "brother," for this expression would also denote a blood relationship. So he needed to call him a "brother-in-faith" or Maula in order not only to let everyone know that they were not genetically related, but also to subject the unfortunate child to a lifelong mental agony for not knowing the name and the identity of his father!

Now, can we imagine a fully-grown man calling an infant "brother-in-faith"? Can we imagine an infant even in the faith, that is, resolving to adopt Islam? Can we imagine a merciful, kind, and compassionate Allah telling Muslim man not to treat an adopted infant with the same love he has for his own son?

And what about an infant female adopted by a Muslim man? Let us find out. The Quran is silent about the adoption of a female child by a Muslim man. Perhaps "Maula" covers such a case. This Arabic word carries many meanings, from cousin through relative to friend. [For instance, Allama Reza Khan translated it as "cousin," Yusuf Ali as close "relative," and Maulana Ashraf Ali] When a Muslim male calls an adopted female child a Maula, he gives himself a sordid opportunity.

Depending on the laws of the land (or lack of it), he can have sex with the child or marry her at a certain age, as she

does not carry his name. But if he gives his name to her or has to call her "daughter," he not only limits his options to an extent, but also may feel psychologically deterred from doing either of the things we have mentioned here.

The ugly implications of Allah's adoption rule for Muslim men prompted one highly respected Muslim scholar to declare that *"adoption in the technical sense is not allowed in Muslim law."* [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *op. cit*, vol. 2, p. 1103] He is telling us that even if a child has no parent or relative to nurse and take care of him or her, a devout Muslim cannot really adopt that unfortunate child. It is Thanvi as "friend**."** better to let him or her die, as the Muslim law does not permit the parenting that might save his or her life.

To us, this is another barbaric cruelty Allah has perpetrated on His own creation. Even many beasts would reject His law, for they often display more compassion, love, and respect for the young than Allah has for helpless human infants. For instance, walruses will adopt unrelated orphans, and dogs will care for animals outside their own species, such as kittens, ducklings, and squirrels. Records show that even a lioness once adopted an orphaned calf whose mother was killed and devoured by another lion.

Yet Muslims consider this edict a divine law from Allah to teach them kindness and humanity. If Allah meant it to promote love, we have to wonder if He knows what love really is!

In reality, Allah aka Muhammad was never kind or loving to the children. In fact, He was callous about whether they lived or died. This we deduce from the following verse of the Quran:

"*Even so, in the eyes of most of the Pagans, their 'partners' made alluring the slaughter of their children, in order to lead them to their own destruction, and cause confusion in their religion. If Allah had willed, they would not have done so: but leave alone them and their inventions.*" [Q 6:137]

This verse clearly indicates that many Pagans murdered their children with the full knowledge of Allah, yet He did nothing to stop them. Why not? The killings advanced more important goals for Him: Confusion in the Pagans' religion and a further step toward their destruction. Strangely, these boosts to strategy could in no way aid an omnipotent Allah, though they could help a brutal human ruler.

We believe Allah was desperate to see the Prophet sleep with Zainab and therefore He laid down His peculiar and inhuman rules of adoption. He knew that when a Pagan adopted a child, he usually loved him or her like his own. While raising an adopted daughter, the Pagan man did not entertain thoughts of having sex with her or of marrying her when she grew up. But to let Muhammad satisfy his licentious desire, Allah broke the Pagans' longstanding taboo with a revelation we find in the Quran. And, when they asked Allah through Muhammad why he, Muhammad, called himself Abu Zaid (father of Zaid) after freeing and adopting the slave-boy Zaid, Allah unashamedly told them that Muhammad was "*not the father of any of your men, but the Apostle of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets.*" [Q 33:40] That is: No one should blame Muhammad for any act he permits himself.

Armed with his/Allah's announcement that entitled him to have sex with essentially any woman he wished, Muhammad went ahead with his scheme to humiliate Zainab and force her

to succumb to his caprices. He approached her mother and brother to ask for her hand in marriage with Zaid.

Zaid was an ex-slave, married, and uncomely, and they rejected his proposal. Infuriated, Muhammad produced a revelation from Allah to make them bow:

33:36: "*It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Apostle, to have any option about their decision. If anyone disobeys Allah and His Apostle, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path.*"

This dictatorial "revelation" had the intended impact. They yielded, fearing Allah's wrath, and gave Zainab in marriage to Zaid. Their wedding gave Muhammad immense satisfaction.

Muhammad wanted Zaid to divorce Zainab immediately afterwards, lest he break her virginity. Zaid, fearing great harm to him from any delay in complying, was about to divorce his new bride, when another Pagan taboo forced Muhammad to come up with a new revelation from Allah, through which he restrained his adopted son from going ahead with his decision. This delay was necessary for Muhammad to prepare himself to face the criticisms of his opponents. Later, when he was about to marry Zainab, he faced another problem: Despite the annulment of the people's age-old practices, they found the entire arrangement he had worked out with Zaid to be repellent and disgusting. So he had Allah tell him:

33:37: "*Behold! Thou didst say to one who had received the grace of Allah and thy favor: "Retain thou (in wedlock) thy wife, and fear Allah." But thou [Muhammad] didst hide in thy heart that which Allah was about to make manifest: Thou didst fear the people, but it is more fitting that thou shouldst fear Allah. Then when Zaid had dissolved (his marriage) with her [Zainab], with the necessary*

(formality), We joined her in marriage to thee: In order that (in future) there may be no difficulty for the Believers in (the matter of marriage) with the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have dissolved with the necessary (formality) (their marriage) with them. And Allah's command must be fulfilled." [This is one of the rare verses in which the name of an ordinary man appears]

Thus, Muhammad had to marry Zainab because Allah had ordered it and no one could defy Him. Hence the Prophet bore no responsibility. Allah had written down these specifics in His Book before the creation of the Universe, clearly anticipating the Zainab affair and the Pagans' nose-holding response. After reading out Allah's decision to the dumbfounded Pagans, Muhammad proceeded to marry Zainab, thus concluding his treacherous scheme against her.

But did the Prophet really marry her? We will find out soon. Let us, at this stage of our narrative, visit the Muslim scholar Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall's introduction to the Sura 33, in which he claims that Allah had arranged Zainab's marriage with Zaid to "break down the old pride of caste," and that "unhappy marriage was no part of Allah's ordinance, and was not to be held sacred in Islam."

Verse 33:36 clearly flouts these claims. It tells us unambiguously that Allah — i.e., Muhammad — had forced Zainab's mother to give her daughter to Zaid, when He knew perfectly well that their marriage would not be a happy one and therefore it would end in a divorce. Despite this foreknowledge, Allah compelled two incompatible persons to get married so that Muhammad could achieve his ends.

Since these facts are clear from the Quran's verses, we believe the Muslim scholar Pickthall blinded himself for obvious reasons: He was embarrassed by the disgusting act of

a man under whose influence he left his natal religion and embraced Islam, and whom he accorded his highest veneration. He did not have the courage to admit that his admired Prophet simply sought to satisfy his lust (to us, his rage for vengeance) and that the act was immoral. Hence he resorted to an apologetics so agonized it amounted to falsehood.

The following verse sums up the broad sexual license Muhammad had granted himself through the voice of Allah, one that gave no consideration to his likely victims:

33:50: "O *Prophet!, We have made lawful to thee the wives whom thou have granted dowers; and those whom thy right hand possesses[slave-girls] out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee; and daughters of thy paternal uncles and aunts, and daughters of thy maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Mecca) with thee; and any believing woman who dedicates her soul to the Prophet if the Prophet wishes to wed her; - this only for thee, and not for the Believers (at large); We know what We have appointed for them as to their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess; - in order that there should be no difficulty for thee. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*"

The Pagans married their cousins, but they abhorred the idea of having sex with them outside the marital knot. Muhammad flouted this requirement of decency and engaged in sexual acts with them without marrying them. Criticized by the Pagans for his loose, unethical conduct, he retaliated by granting license for himself to undertake open acts of fornication with his cousins and with any woman who offered her body to him for free.

Nature eventually reacted to his excesses and it turned his tool into a useless lump of flesh. Though Allah had granted

extreme sexual license to Muhammad alone, "so that there should be no difficulty" for him, He curiously did not provide Muhammad with Viagra and relieve his biggest difficulty of all.

Incidentally, the Arabic word "*Nikah*" Allah has used in verse 33:50 did not originally denote marriage. The experts in the Arabic language (*ahl-e-lughat*) opine that sexual relationship, in the time of Muhammad, was the original meaning of this word and later it acquired general meaning of marriage and sexual relationship. According to this definition, Allah permitted Muhammad to establish relationship with any woman for the purpose of having sex without marrying her!

All obstacles to bringing Zainab into his harem thus removed, Muhammad wanted her in his bed at once. While she was already on her way, his zeal to avenge his insult as well as his sadistic inclinations toward her overwhelmed his senses and he went into a trance.

Upon recovery, he moaned: "who will go unto Zainab and tell her the good tidings that [Allah] hath given her to me in marriage, even in heaven." [Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 213] In his eagerness to injure Zainab emotionally, Muhammad violated the formalities that formed the basis of marriage between a Muslim man and a woman. Claiming that Allah had already gotten them married in the Gardens (heaven), he paid no dowers to her — a requirement so basic that no Muslim man can consummate his marriage without fulfilling it1 — and took her to bed straightaway. How the Pagans had reacted to this bizarre and anti-social deed of the Prophet of Islam is not recorded in the Quran.

Eighth Wife: Juwairiyah. Also known as Barra, Juwairiyah belonged to the clan of Bani Mustalik and had become a

captive of Muslims. A gorgeous woman, she fell into the hands of a Helper from Medina who, appreciating her allure, set a high ransom for her freedom. Muhammad learned of her predicament and, entranced by her beauty, paid the ransom and added her to his harem.

Ninth Wife: Umm Habiba. Umm Habiba was the daughter of Abu Sufian, Muhammad's uncle and persistent, sworn foe. She was married to Ubayd Allah ibn Jahsh. While in Abyssinia, Ubayd converted to Christianity and died, though she remained a Muslim.

Once she saw a dream in which someone addressed her as the "mother of the faithful," which she interpreted to mean that she would marry the Prophet of Islam. She did, and later Abu Sufian is reported to have remarked, "By heaven, this camel is so rampant that no muzzle can restrain him."

Tenth Wife: Safiya. Safiya, a Jewess of great beauty, belonged to a tribe of Khaybar. She married Kinana when she was 17. A few months later, Muhammad reached Khaybar on an expedition against her tribe. At this time, Safiya had a dream. She saw a brilliant moon hanging in the sky and knew that beneath it lay the city of Medina. The moon began to move towards Khaybar, where it fell into her lap. When she woke up, and told her husband what she had seen in her sleep, he hit her in the face and said, "This can only mean that thou desirest the King of the Hijaz, Muhammad."

After Khaybar fell to Muslims, they beheaded Safiya's husband and brought her to Muhammad as a captive, still bearing the mark of the blow on her face. He asked the cause of the injury and she told him the story of her dream. Flattered, he took her as one of his wives without paying her any dowers. [Bukhari, vol. 2, book 14, hadith no. 68] This

invalidated his marriage with her. But it did not matter to him and he continued to live with her until his death.

He also did not require her to observe the Iddat (i.e., the waiting period of four months and ten days that every Muslim woman has to observe before she can marry a man and have sex with him after the death of her husband [Cf. Q 2:234]), thus again grossly violating Allah's order. Their nuptials took place while the remains of her murdered husband still awaited burial.

Eleventh Wife: Maimuna. Maimuna was a widow. Her full sister, Umm al-Fadl, was married to Muhammad's uncle al-Abbas. He offered his sister-in-law in marriage to his nephew about two years before his death, when he came to Mecca on his lesser pilgrimage. He accepted the offer and married Maimuna while still wearing the pilgrim's Ihram. [Bukhari, vol. 7, book 62, no. 49] He consummated the marriage at Sarif, a few miles outside of Mecca. Ordinary Muslims are not permitted to marry or to have sex while in their Ihram.

Twelfth Wife: Esma. Esma was the sister of a princely desert chief of Najd who gave her in marriage to the emerging King of Hijaz to prevent him from seizing his estate. Realizing that he was impotent, Esma left him the very night they were married. Muslim apologists have related the incident with a twist. They tell us that since she was young and ravishing, Aisha and Hafsah grew insecure, fearing that Muhammad would give her more attention than them. Consequently, they instilled a fear of him in Esma's mind. It worked well and she turned away all his attempts to engage her in sex on the night she joined his harem. Her persistent refusal to copulate infuriated the Prophet and he divorced her without consummating the marriage. [R.V.C. Bodley, op. cit. p. 266]

Maxime Rodinson speaks of another wife whom Muhammad divorced on the ground that she, too, had denied him sexual access.

According to many of Muhammad's biographers, only nine of his wives ever lived together in the quarters, which he had built on the grounds of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. As noted earlier, these quarters also housed an unknown number of slave-girls.

They catered to all of his needs, which included sexual pleasure. For them to deny him sexual access would have tantamount to displeasing Allah, earning them severe punishment on earth as well as in the world hereafter.

The Concubines and Maria's Surprise

Apart from his wives and slave-girls, Muhammad also owned a number of concubines. Two of them— Rihana and Maria Qibtia — deserve note.

Rihana was a Jew from Bani Quraiza, the most beautiful woman of her tribe. After Muhammad annihilated most of the men of her tribe, he chose her for himself before distributing booty among his followers. Some writers maintain that Muhammad married her after she became a Muslim. Others say that she remained a Jew and died a Jew, five years after her enslavement. They add, however, that once when her master discovered that she had not become pregnant (and how she could have, when her man was impotent?), he asked her to embrace Islam. She is said to have deflected his suggestion saying, "O Messenger of Allah, leave me in thy power; that will be easier for me and for thee."

Maria Qibtia was a Coptic girl. Muquaqis, the ruler of Alexandria, sent her and her sister Shiren Qibtia to

Muhammad, as presents. Maria was stunningly beautiful. Both sisters captivated him, but since his own law forbade him from marrying or having sex with two sisters "at one and the same time," [Q 4:23] he reluctantly gave Shiren away to his close friend, the poet Hasan ibn Thabit. She bore him a son, whom they named Abdul Rahman.

Later, Hasan became Muhammad's poet laureate.

Maria bore a son for Muhammad, whom they named Ibrahim after the patriarch Abraham. According to most biographers, the boy died when he was 15 months old. The death caused Muhammad great anguish and, as he bent over and laid the little body into the ground, he cried uncontrollably from the depths of his heart. He had placed his hope in this child for transmitting his name to posterity.

These reported lamentations contrast dramatically with his conduct after the deaths of his three sons by Khadija. Though all of them also died in infancy, he neither wept nor expressed any grief. Similarly, no historical record indicates that he cried or felt sorrow at the death of Khadija herself. Could indifference towards his sons have led to their deaths?

We have our doubts about Ibrahim's paternity, for the following reasons. Travel to distant places in 7th century was difficult and hazardous. Many people of the Arabian Peninsula did journey on trade to such places as Syria, Persia, and Egypt, but those voyages were infrequent. Organizing the caravans took a long time, given the great risk to lives and property, and merchants embarked on their trips only after preparing themselves in all respects.

Because of the peril, Meccans traveled only once in a year to Syria and other distant lands for trade. They always sent small caravans, which offered less tempting targets to

highway brigands and helped save lives. Traveling great distances alone through the deserts was almost unheard of.

Owing to all the hardships, women and the elderly avoided long journeys. When they were forced to go somewhere, they usually rode on camelback. Otherwise, almost all travelers were strong young individuals willing to walk hundreds of miles while their camels bore people who had grown exhausted.

When Muhammad decided to ask Muquaqis, the ruler of Alexandria, to accept Islam, he selected Hatib b. Abu Balta'a. Hatib was a young man both willing to undertake the dangerous journey and to completing it successfully. Muhammad likely gave him a horse or a mule to cover the distance between Medina and Alexandria.

On his journey back, this young man had as company two beautiful damsels: Maria and Shirin Qibtia. They traveled together, ate together, and slept together in the same tent. Hatib was of course an Arab, most of whom could not survive without sex, and he felt tempted by the girls. He made his move. Well aware that they were in the midst of a desert where Hatib's help was as essential as a few drops of water, the girls could not refuse him. Rather, they indicated their willingness and cooperation.

Hatib established a physical relationship with both of them, which continued until they arrived at the gate of Medina where he delivered them to Muhammad. The Prophet was struck by their beauty. Forced by his own law to choose one of them, he picked the prettier Maria for his harem, unaware that she was pregnant.

Muhammad — nay, Allah — permitted Muslim men to have sex with their female slaves without marrying them.[1]

Muslims are required, under the decree, to accord a bastard child ("a person born of unmarried parents," according to the dictionary) the same care, privileges, respect, honor, and opportunities as a legitimate one. This Islamic spirit enabled in the past many bastards not only to live normal lives, but attain high office and prestige. For instance, Wasiq was a bastard who became a Caliph in 842 A.D., after succeeding his father Must'asim. Wasiq was the son of the Greek slave girl Karatis. [Q 4:24]

We don't know how Muhammad's sons with Khadija were born or how they died. However, we surmise that Khadija likely gave birth to them when he was undergoing training in the cave of Hira or struggling to establish his apostolic mission among the Pagans. In either case, his preoccupation would have hindered him from taking good care of his children.

Moreover, his obsession with his mission may have prevented him from understanding the vital role that a son could play in his lifetime and after his death. Initially, he was not especially confident of his success, and he certainly did not foresee his near-absolute rule over the Peninsula. Consequently, he did not realize the need for an able son who could carry on his mission after he was dead. Moreover, an Arab without a son was a man with no honor. By the time he realized his mistake, and was desperate to have one, it was too late, for no man with erectile dysfunction was able to produce, until recently, a child of his own.

After being in Muhammad's company for some time, Maria disclosed that she was pregnant. The news shocked him, since they both knew he was not her impregnator. But both understood the expedient course and they agreed to play a game of pretense, hoping that the child would be a boy. A

male child would give Muhammad a potential successor, and Maria perhaps her freedom and a good, happy life. The boy's death in infancy devastated them.

Muhammad's declaration of Maria's pregnancy created an uproar among many of his lukewarm supporters. They had an inkling of the nature of his sex life and did not believe he was the father. Muhammad was unable to contain their discontent and, to divert their attention from Maria, he put her up in a separate house, though his other women all lived in the quarters he had built beside his mosque. The child's untimely death rescued Muhammad from the consequences of his followers' lingering suspicions.

But the separation of Maria created another problem: It upset her and she began to blackmail him over the paternity of her child to force him to bring her back to his harem. He tried to calm her, but failed. Hence, he brought her to his harem, where Hafsah found her in his company in her own room. A brouhaha ensued and it led him to threaten all his wives with mass divorce. We shall talk about it shortly.

In vain attempts to defend Muhammad's lascivious deeds, some modern historians of Islam contradict the accounts of earlier writers such as Ibn Ishaq and Waqidi. They assert that Maria and Shiren were the daughters of Simon, one of the most respected Coptic leaders, and the Archbishop of Alexandria. He sent these two young women to Muhammad with the request to treat them with all the honor due to them. They were, therefore, not slaves as stated by Waqidi and others. [Rafiq Zakaria, *op. cit.*, p. 53]

These historians, however, do not explain why the Archbishop sent those women to Muhammad, and what was he supposed to do with them. Without answering these basic

questions, the scholars insist that Muhammad married Maria and had Shiren married to his friend Hasan Ibn Thabit.

"Hell Is Inhabited by Women!"

Within a few years of his arrival in Medina, Muhammad became rich for the second time in his life (the first occurring after his marriage to Khadija). He now possessed abundant resources, acquired through plunder and seizure. He also owned several oasis properties confiscated from Jews. He could once again lavish largesse on whomever he pleased.

Despite his affluence, his poor sexual health saddened him. Failure to achieve erection made him the object of his wives' scorn. Their meaningful glances at each other made him feel demeaned, their demands for sex made him feel like a eunuch, their giggles at his impotence made his cheeks burn, their inattention to his presence made him feel abandoned, and their clandestine efforts at procuring lovers made his blood boil. [Q 33:32 and 33]

Overall, their attitude made him feel helpless once again in life, as when his mother had left him in Mecca with strangers, and when he moved into the homes of Abdul Mutallib and Abu Talib where no woman comforted him in his distress.

As if these insults were not enough, all his wives ganged up to demand hefty increases in their allowances. He could not oblige, for the enhanced cost would soon have bankrupted him. His refusal caused them to rebel against him en masse.

Finding no easy solution to his sexual and domestic problems, Muhammad resorted to his usual revelations. Through one, he asked all his wives to give up their clamor for sex, saying that his mere presence in their midst should be more satisfying than carnal relations. [Q 33:51] Through

another, he chastised them for demanding larger allowances, telling them: "If it be that ye desire the life of this world, and its glitter, then come! I will provide for your enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner." [Quran, 33:28]

Thus making his intentions clear, Muhammad took to spending his nights in Aisha's room. He had two purposes: To avoid the grown, sex-starved women, and to gratify his own perverted sexual needs with Aisha, as he had been since her infancy.

To Muhammad's dismay, his move not only failed to solve his problems, but unwittingly made him a victim of Aisha's caprices. Feeling elevated by his regular nocturnal visits, she despised even the slightest variation in his timetable. Though she had never experienced the pleasures that the penile penetrations give women, Aisha is believed to have developed a weird possessiveness towards her man.

Once he arrived in Aisha's room late. Seizing the opportunity to take him to task, she demanded to know where he had been.

"I have been with Umm Salama," Muhammad replied.

"Hast thou not had thy fill of Umm Salama?" she asked, and he smiled without answering. She added sarcastically, "O Messenger of Allah, tell me thyself. If thou wert between the two slopes of a valley, one of which had not been grazed whereas the other had been grazed, on which wouldst thou pasture thy flocks?"

"On that which had not been grazed," said Muhammad.

"Even so," Aisha said, "and I am not as any other of thy wives. Every woman of them had a husband before thee, except myself."

Aisha's continual nagging and the persistent haranguing of his other wives took its toll on Muhammad's mental health. He grew more sadistic toward women. He chided girls for wearing trinkets in their childhood, he derided their allegedly foolish nature, [Q 16:92] he declared them unable to win debates against men, he equated one man's intelligence with two women's, [Q 2:282] he decreed man's hegemony over woman, he put the right of marriage and divorce in man's hands, [Q 2:236, 229-230] and he promoted a notion of women as semi-animate sexual beings, with whom he encouraged his followers to have sex, as we have mentioned earlier, "in any manner, when and how they willed." [Q 2:222- 223]

Contrary to our observations about Muhammad's dysfunctional sex life, some Muslim writers tell us that he could sexually satisfy all his wives, concubines, and slave-girls in a single night, for "he had the virility of twenty men." [Martin Lings, *op. cit*., p. 271] Yet the learned writers do not tell us why, if he was so manly, none of his women, other than Khadija, ever conceived, even after living with him as long as ten years? Could all the women have been barren? We do not think so. The problem rested with Muhammad, as he had lost the ability to have penile sex with them a long time ago.

By custom, Arabs procured slaves through abduction or purchase from time immemorial. Men and women, enslaved through wars, became the possession of their masters. Their masters engaged them in sexual acts whenever they fancied. Female mistresses, too, used their male slaves to satisfy their sexual needs. Condoning the Pagan Arabs' promiscuous behavior, Muhammad aka Allah allowed his own followers to satisfy their sexual inclinations in the same manner.

Muhammad's mere interaction with other females evoked his wives' wrath, even after he had become sexually dysfunctional. The following incident illustrates the intensity of their distrust of him.

As we have mentioned earlier, one day, a drunken Muhammad was in Hafsah's room with his concubine Maria Qibtia. Hafsah returned unexpectedly and found them together. [See Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Glorious Koran*, p. 405; R. V. C. Bodley, op. cit., p. 266; and N. J. Dawood, op. cit., p. 398] Dismayed, she asked what he was doing in her room with a slave-girl. He replied, "Be quiet! I swear in the name of Allah that I shall never see her again. But whatever you know about me and her, you must not tell anyone else." [Humayun Azad, *Nari* (*Women*), p. 77. His account of their togetherness differs slightly from others]

Inflamed perhaps by his casual dismissal of the matter and by the news of Maria's pregnancy, the angry Hafsah related this conversation to Aisha. Both confronted him and demanded an explanation of his conduct as well as his statement to Hafsah about having a child by his concubine. Unashamed, he sought in vain to calm the shrieking women by repeatedly promising to avoid Maria in future. The women did not believe him and clamored on like banshees.

Finally, Muhammad broke. "Hell is inhabited by women!" he cried and added: "You women are more contemptuous of Allah than me. I shall not visit you for a month!" Then he stormed out of Hafsah's room.

Though Muhammad had promised not to be with Maria again, he soon realized that without a relationship with her he would lose his claim on the child. To help dissolve his promise to Hafsah, he asked himself:

"O Prophet! Why holdest thou to be forbidden that which Allah has made lawful to thee? Thou seekest to please thy consorts? But Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. "Allah has already ordained for you, (O men,) the dissolution of your oaths [in some cases]: And Allah is your Protector, and He is full of knowledge and Wisdom.

"When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his consorts [Hafsah], and she then divulged it [to another, that is, Aisha], and Allah made it known to him [Muhammad], he [Muhammad] confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said: 'Who told thee this?' He said: 'He [Allah] told me who knows and is well-acquainted (with all things).'

"If ye two turn in repentance to Him, your hearts are indeed so inclined; but if ye back up each other against him [Muhammad], truly Allah is his Protector, and Gabriel, and (every) righteous one among those who believe, — and furthermore, the angels — will back (him) up.

"It may well be, if he [Muhammad] divorced you (all), that Allah will give him in exchange Consorts better than you, — who submit (their wills), who believe, who are devout, who turn to Allah in repentance, who worship (in humility, who travel (for Faith) and fast, — previously married or virgins." [Quran, 66:1-5]

From the above verses, we can safely infer that it was Maria's pregnancy that he had shared with Hafsah, but denied when Aisha wanted confirmation. The other thing he had acquainted Hafsah with is obscure.

The language of the verses shows that the incident of Maria did not remain confined to Muhammad, Hafsah, and Aisha. Rather, it seems to have spread to his entire harem, making it impossible for him to contain the inmates' revolt. It also tells us that his wives routinely disobeyed him. Furthermore, they were not used to observing the basic rituals of Islam, such as

praying and giving alms. He admonished them in the past for their shortcomings, but it seems they paid him no heed and continued to live as suited their fancies and characters.

Before the showdown between Muhammad and his wives over Maria and her child, Muhammad had tried various means to control them. He cajoled them. He implored them to act like the Prophet's wives. [Q 33:32] He demanded that they stay home quietly and not make dazzling displays of themselves [Q 33.33] to avoid drawing the attention of lurking suitors. He told them to pray regularly, practice charity, obey him, and recite what he taught them about his or Allah's Signs and Wisdom. [Q 33:34] When all these methods failed, he even threatened them with a second punishment in the next life if they continued to disobey him with their sinful conduct. [Q 33:30]

Nothing Muhammad said or did seems to have changed his wives' behavior (why the translator used "consorts" for his wives is perplexing to us). As the last resort, he issued the threat of divorce, knowing it would be effective at least in two ways:

Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr, while Hafsah was Omar's daughter. Both those men aspired to power, wealth, and fame after their son-in-law was gone. Hence, they always supported him, even on matters others considered false and untenable.

Muhammad knew their weakness and state of mind. He also knew that in his dispute with his wives, they would support him — and not their daughters — to maintain the congeniality of their relationship.

He was right. On hearing Muhammad/Allah's threat of divorce, Abu Bakr and Omar approached their daughters and

chastised them for disobeying their husband. They also made it clear to their daughters that should he carry out his threat, they would receive no support from them, not even shelter in their homes.

Even so, divorce was not the only danger they faced. Allah also warned the helpless women that if they continued to league against His Prophet, not only would He protect Muhammad, but so would angel Gabriel, all other angels, numbering trillions, if not zillions, and every righteous person among the believers!

This statement from Allah puts us in a quandary: What prompted Him to come up with such an all-encompassing protection plan? Why did He feel He needed such extraordinary force to prevail over these two women? Had Aisha and Hafsah threatened Muhammad with death? Why did Allah want the women "to turn in repentance to Him," when they had apparently done nothing to offend Him, unless Muhammad was Allah? And why did Allah need the help of angel Gabriel, all other angels, and an unspecified number of believers to tame two errant women? Was the Creator of the Universe not powerful enough to deal with two women and save His Prophet's life?

We believe, first, that Muhammad himself had issued these threats and magnified the number of imaginary allies to intimidate his wives, not realizing at the moment that Allah hardly needed them. Second, we think the key factor was the other righteous believers.

Though mere mortals, these people, unlike the angels, really existed and their inclusion in the threat could have the desired effect on Aisha and Hafsah.

His wives weighed the consequences of his threats, especially of divorce. They had seen with their own eyes the despicable lives of divorcees in their own town. They also clearly visualized the further difficulties they would endure after divorce from their highly powerful and vindictive husband and the righteous believers.

Bereft of parental support and faced with difficult, uncertain prospects after divorce, Muhammad's helpless wives had no choice but to yield. He was happy with the outcome of his ploy. Following their surrender, they lived as he wanted them to live, they breathed the air he wanted them to breathe, and they subsisted on what he provided. They dwelt with him until his death in 632 A.D., without any conjugal rights. [Quran; 33:51]

Thus, despite all his worldly successes, and the wealth he had amassed, Muhammad lived a hellish family life, as we can deduce from the following Hadith (which also tells us how brazenly he violated verse 4:3 of the Quran):

Narrated Urwa from Aisha: "The wives of Allah's Apostle were in two groups. One group consisted of Aisha, Hafsa, Safiyya and Sauda; and the other group consisted of Um Salama and the other wives of Allah's Apostle. The Muslims knew that Allah's Apostle loved Aisha, so if any of them had a gift and wished to give to Allah's Apostle, he would delay it, till Allah's Apostle had come to Aisha's home and then he would send his gift to Allah's Apostle in her home."

The group of Um Salama discussed the matter together and decided that Um Salama should request Allah's Apostle to tell the people to send their gifts to him in whatever wife's house he was. Um Salama told Allah's Apostle of what they had said, but he did not reply. Then they (those wives) asked Um Salama about it. She said,

"He did not say anything to me." They asked her to talk to him again. She talked to him again when she met him on her day, but he gave no reply. When they asked her, she replied that he had given no reply. They said to her, "Talk to him till he gives you a reply."

When it was her turn, she talked to him again. He then said to her, "Do not hurt me regarding Aisha, as the Divine Inspirations do not come to me on any of the beds except that of Aisha." On that Um Salama said, "I repent to Allah for hurting you." Then the group of Um Salama called Fatima, the daughter of Allah's Apostle, and sent her to Allah's Apostle to say to him, "Your wives request to treat them and the daughter of Abu Bakr on equal terms." Then Fatima conveyed the message to him. The Prophet said, "O my daughter! Don't you love whom I love?" She replied in the affirmative and returned and told them of the situation. They requested her to go to him again but she refused.

They then sent Zainab bint Jahsh who went to him and used harsh words saying, "Your wives request you to treat them and the daughter of Ibn Abu Quhafa on equal terms." On that she raised her voice and abused Aisha to her face so much so that Allah's Apostle looked at Aisha to see whether she would retort. Aisha started replying to Zainab till she silenced her. The Prophet then looked at Aisha and said, "She is really the daughter of Abu Bakr." [Sahih Bukhari, vol. 3, book 47, no. 755]

The Children

Opinions vary on the number of Muhammad's legitimate children. The general belief is that he had seven with Khadija: Qasim, Tayyib, Tahir, Zainab, Rokeya, Umm Kulthum, and Fatima. [Ibn Ishaq; op. cit. p. 83] All his daughters lived long, but none of his sons survived beyond infancy. The causes and

facts about their deaths remain shrouded in secrecy. Historians should address this intriguing matter so that the students of Islamic history can put to rest their suspicion that Muhammad was involved, even if indirectly, in their demise.

Muhammad's eldest daughter, Zainab, married Abu Aass. Rokeya and Umm Kulthum, his second and third daughters, married respectively Othba and Otabaya, two sons of his uncle, Abu Lahab. When Muhammad began preaching Islam, Abu Lahab and his wife Umm Jamil became his hardened enemies. To punish him, they forced their sons to repudiate their wives, causing the aggrieved Muhammad to vent his rage in a diatribe against Abu Lahab and his wife in Sura 111, entitled "Abu Lahab, the Father of Flame."

In its entirety, this Sura reads: "*May the hands of Abu Lahab perish! May he himself perish! Nothing shall his wealth and gains avail him. He shall be burnt in a flaming fire, and his wife, laden with firewood, shall have a rope of fiber around her neck*!"

After their divorce, Muhammad gave Rokeya in marriage to Othman ibn Affan, his companion and confidante. She died in Medina after her return from Abyssinia, following the Battle of Badr. Othman subsequently married Umm Kulthum, his sister-in-law.

After the Battle of Badr, Abu Bakr and Omar, Muhammad's elderly fathers-in-law, sought the hand in marriage of his youngest daughter Fatima, then about 20. He refused their requests and arranged her marriage to his cousin Ali, one of the first persons to embrace Islam after Muhammad had begun preaching it some 15 years ago.

Fatima's marriage with Ali brings an important thought to mind: Though Muhammad married Aisha when she was six, he married off his own daughter only after she had become an

adult. This fact suggests that child marriage in his time was not as common as many have claimed; only the rich, powerful, or depraved practiced it.

Though Ali was a poor man, Muhammad decided to marry off his daughter with a lavishness hitherto unknown in Medina. He slaughtered a ram and, supplementing it with grain donated by the local people, he prepared a feast for the entire population of the city. Attendees confessed later that they had never seen its equal anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula. Why he did not pay for the entire feast himself is an enigma to us, especially since he was by then a rich man. Perhaps his practice of collecting fees [Q 58:12] from people who sought his advice became so ingrained as to make him seek donations even when he was marrying off his daughter!

The responsibility for preparing Fatima's nuptial bed in the groom's house fell to her stepmother Aisha, then barely 11. She had some soft sand collected from the river, scattered on the earthen floor, and covered with sheepskin. She placed a pillow of leather stuffed with palm-fiber atop it, thus completing the grand nuptial bed to the admiration of all who happened to see this rare display.

Avenging the Letter-Bearer

Almost a year had elapsed since the Pagans had kept Muhammad out of Mecca. By the terms of the treaty, he could now visit the holy shrine and perform his pilgrimage with his votaries. Accordingly, he left Medina in 629 A.D. with a large, well-armed entourage, along with 70 camels to sacrifice at the altar of the idols, which he would oust from their sanctuary in the following year.

The Meccans heard of Muhammad's impending arrival and retired to the neighboring hills, thereby allowing Muslims to

perform their religious obligations uninterruptedly. As Muslims approached the sacred grounds of the Ka'aba, they laid aside their warlike trappings, except the swords, which they carried sheathed. Charged with great emotion and joy, Muslims entered the gates of the sacred grounds in the pilgrim garb their ancestors had worn before them. With zeal and devotion, Muhammad performed all the ancient Pagan rites. He also circled the Ka'aba seven times, even though it still housed all the Pagan deities he had launched his crusade against some 20 years ago.

Muhammad then retired to a place called Sarif, a short distance from the Ka'aba, to perform a ceremony of a different kind. Here, he consummated his marriage with Maimuna, whom he had married while still wearing his Ihram, the pilgrimage garb. As noted, ordinary Muslims could not marry or have sexual intercourse in the state of Ihram.

The Prophet of Islam broke this rule, as he was its maker. His companions, not being in a position to question him on his conduct, joined him here to return home. Having seen their leader add a new wife to the crowded harem he had set up in Medina for his sexual pleasure, they remained full of admiration for Allah.

Six months later, Muhammad sent a letter to the governor of Bosra in Syria, urging him to become a Muslim. As the letter-bearer was returning home, someone killed him, perhaps an Arab of the Christian tribe of Bani Ghassan. To avenge the death, Muhammad prepared to send an army of 3,000 soldiers against the tribe. The troops, under Zaid's command, had orders to march rapidly, fall upon the Bani Ghassan by surprise, and destroy them utterly. Several other

dedicated officers joined the mission to take the helm, if Zaid died in the affray.

As the Muslim forces set out, the Bani Ghassan picked up the news and they too marshaled a formidable force, some say, of 4,000 to 5,000 Arab tribesmen, to meet their adversaries head on. While on the march, Muslims learned of the superior Ghassan forces and reacted with anxiety. They hastily called a war council and, after a heated debate, decided to engage the enemy without regard to the outcome. They were convinced that if they won, they would profit from the booty, and if they fell, they would earn Paradise and dwell eternally in the arms of sloe-eyed Hurs.

Both sides met on a mountain ridge east of Moab. After an initial skirmish, Muslims withdrew to a village called Mota, where the opposing armies again came in contact. The bloody Battle of Mota ensued. Zaid and his lieutenants were killed and the rank and file of the Muslim army panicked.

At that critical moment, Khaled, a fierce Pagan recently converted to Islam, took command and by deceptive ploys led the enemy to believe that the Muslim army had received a massive reinforcement. Khaled then launched his attack, forcing the warriors of Bani Ghassan to retreat and then to flee. Muslims overtook them in flight and decimated them. The victors rampaged through the enemy camp and found enough booty to satisfy the lust of each Muslim soldier. Their commander-in-chief, Muhammad, and Allah also received their allotted share.

Some historians, such as Sir John Glubb, tell a different story. They say the Muslim army lost this battle, so angering Muslims of Medina as to make them throw dirt at it, when it returned home.

The Capture of Mecca

Muslims had reached a stage where victories in battle had given them bold confidence, both in themselves and in Muhammad. They now felt completely sure of themselves when facing any enemy who dared challenge their leader's authority. He, on his part, felt no qualms in subduing any opponent, either by force of arms or deceptive diplomacy. He therefore turned his attention to Mecca, from which he had so ignominiously escaped some eight years ago, and decided to take it over, restore it to the worship of one true Allah, and make it a rallying point of his religion.

He was ready to start at once, but one term of the Treaty of Hudaybiyya proved an impediment. It provided for peace between the parties for ten years. He thus began to look for an opportunity to help him achieve his goal without violating the treaty. And the opportunity came his way, rather too soon.

Another clause of the treaty authorized both Muhammad and the Meccan Quraish to conclude treaties with any tribe that wished to join them for any reason. By agreeing to such treaties, tribes became parties to the ten-year truce. On this basis, the Quraish made a treaty with the tribe of Kinana, while Muhammad did the same with the tribe of Khuzza.

It so happened that a man of Bani Kinana killed a man of the tribe of Khuzza in fulfillment of an old blood feud. Sporadic clashes then took place between the parties, in which the Quraishites allegedly aided their ally, the Bani Kinana. These actions of the Quraish and Kinana are claimed to have led Muhammad to conquer Mecca in order to punish, in particular, the Quraish people for their alleged violation of the treaty.

We believe that the charge leveled against the Quraish and Bani Kinana was spurious. The Prophet might have concocted it. Muslims now use this concoction to claim that the Quraish and their ally — and not he — had violated the treaty, thus forcing him to retaliate and capture Mecca. Abu Sufian's helpless approach to him at this time and his ignominious treatment by Muhammad supports our contention.

At any rate, Muhammad decided to act against the Quraish, take over Mecca, and rid it of the nuisance that the Quraish people had created for him ever since he began preaching Islam in the city of his birth.

The Quraishites learned of the developments in Medina and decided to send Abu Sufian there to explain the truth to Muhammad who, in the meantime, had become the emissary's son-in-law. Accordingly, Abu Sufian went to Muhammad's house to see his daughter, Umm Habiba, through whom he thought he could motivate his son-in-law to resolve the issue peacefully. When his daughter snubbed him, he went to Muhammad directly. He had come to the person he despised most because the welfare of the Meccans was very dear to his heart, yet Muhammad refused to talk to him. Abu Sufian felt humiliated, but he persisted. Finding no easy way to present his case to his son-in-law, he sought the intercession of Abu Bakr, Ali, and Omar. All rebuked him. Eventually, he mounted his camel and trekked back to Mecca with a heavy heart.

Scarcely had Abu Sufian taken leave when Muhammad issued orders for all to prepare to march on Mecca. He also summoned his allies from all quarters to join him, and blocked every route leading to Mecca to keep intelligence about his looming march from reaching the Meccans.

Muhammad departed for Mecca in 630 A.D. with 10,000 men at his command. They reached the valley near the sacred city and pitched tents in the dark of night to avoid detection. Abu Sufian somehow heard about the arrival of the Prophet and his forces and tried to reach him at his campsite. A scouting party, however, seized him and delivered him to the Muslim commander-in-chief. Seeing his inveterate enemy in his grasp, Muhammad felt immensely delighted, but he set Sufian free when he embraced Islam and acknowledged Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah and the savior of his people.

As a Muslim, Abu Sufian obtained favorable terms from Muhammad for the people of Mecca. One provision held that none would be hurt if they remained quietly in their homes or took refuge in the house of Abu Sufian (this indicates the number of people who lived in Mecca at the time). Back in Mecca, Abu Sufian assembled his people and told them of the massive size of Muhammad's army on their doorstep and its capacity to take over their city and annihilate its population. He also detailed his covenant with Muhammad and asked the Meccans either to stay indoors or to take refuge in his house.

His words had the desired effect, and most agreed to witness the conqueror enter their city without resistance.

At sunrise next morning, Muhammad neared the sacred grounds, seated on his camel and reciting verses from his compositions. With reverence he rode to the holy shrine of Ka'aba and circled it seven times. The Ka'aba still housed all the Pagan idols within and without its four walls.

Muhammad then ordered the doors of the shrine opened and he gazed at the idols he circumambulated with veneration a while ago. Pictures of the Pagan deities covered the shrines

inside walls of the shrine, as did an icon of the Virgin Mary with child Jesus and a painting of an old man thought to be Abraham who Muhammad believed had laid the foundation of Islam. Placing these two images under his protection, he ordered Othman, his son-in-law, to destroy all the others.

After taking over Mecca, Muhammad committed a series of horrendous crimes, thereby violating Allah's promise made in this verse below, from the days when the Prophet was living there:

"*Remember We made the House a place of assembly for men and a place of safety; and take ye the Station of Abraham as a place of prayer; and We covenanted with Abraham and Ismail that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use a retreat , or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer.*" [The Quran, 2:125]

What did the sacredness of "the House of Allah" mean? One Muslim scholar of repute explains:

"*The Ka'ba, the House of Allah. Its foundation goes back by Arab tradition to Abraham. Its fourfold character is here referred to. (1). It was the centre to which all the Arab tribes resorted for trade, for poetic contests, and worship. (2). It was a sacred territory, and was respected by friend and foe alike. All fighting was and is forbidden within its limits, and even arms are not allowed to be carried, and no game or other thing is allowed to be killed. Like Cities of Refuge under the Mosaic Dispensation, to which manslayers could flee (Num. xxxv.6), or the Sanctuaries in Mediaeval Europe, to which criminals could not be pursued, Mecca was recognized by Arab custom as inviolable for the purpose of revenge. (3). it was a place of prayer: even to-day there is a Station of Abraham within the enclosure [Masjidul Haram] where Abraham was supposed to have*

prayed. (4). It must be held pure and sacred for all purposes." [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 52]

Without investigating the scholar's suspicion that Abraham had never really prayed at the Station of Abraham, let us learn from Ibn Ishaq what Muhammad did after he captured Mecca:

"The apostle had instructed his commanders when they entered Mecca only to fight those who resisted them, except a small number who were to be killed even if they were found beneath the curtains of the Ka'ba. Among them was 'Abdullah b. Sa'd, brother of the B. Amir b. Lu'ayy. The reason he was ordered to be killed was that he had been a Muslim and used to write down revelation; then he apostatized and returned to Quraysh and fled to Uthman b. Affan whose foster-brother he was. The latter hid him until he brought him to the apostle after the situation in Mecca was tranquil, and asked that he might be granted immunity. They allege that the apostle remained silent for a long time till he said yes. When Uthman had left he said to his companions who were sitting around him, 'I kept silent so that one of you might get up and strike off his head!' One of the Ansar said, 'Then why didn't you give me a sign, O apostle of Allah?' He answered that a prophet does not kill by pointing.

"Another was 'Abdullah b. Khatal of B. Taym b. Ghalib. He had become a Muslim and the apostle sent him to collect the poor tax in company with one of the Ansars. He had with him a freed slave who served him. (He was a Muslim). When they halted he ordered the latter to kill a goat for him and prepare some food, and went to sleep. When he woke up the man had done nothing, so he attacked and killed him and apostatized. He had two singing-girls Fartana and her friend who used to sing satirical songs about the apostle, so

he ordered that they should be killed with him." [Sirat Rasulallah, pp. 550-551 ff]

Ibn Ishaq names additional people on the Prophet's hit list for insults they had heaped on at him and other acts that displeased him.

We do not know if Muhammad's followers killed these people inside the "Sacred Mosque" (*Masjidul Haram*) within which the Ka'aba lies, but his order to strike off their heads "even if they were found beneath the curtains of the Ka'aba" was a gross violation of the immunity Allah had granted them through Muhammad himself. Yet Allah took no action against him. Why not? Was Allah helpless against Muhammad? If so, why? While Muhammad was busy turning Mecca's idols to dust, Khalid proceeded to Nakhla to demolish the temple of *al-Uzza*, one of the three eminent shrines of Paganism in Arabia. At the news of his approach, the temple guardian hung his sword on the statue of the goddess and called upon her to defend herself from the wrath of her antagonist.

When Khalid razed the temple and its idol to the ground, he saw a black woman, entirely naked, with long and wildly flowing hair, emerge from the debris of the ruins. He instantly recognized the figure to be al-Uzza herself and drawing his sword, he cut her into pieces!

Even fantasies have a limit. This is not the case with Muslims; they see and hear things that no normal humans would even think of in their lives!

Once Muhammad had destroyed the Pagan idols, he declared the Ka'aba purified: an object of pilgrimage to be revered as long as Islam should inspire its adherents.

The Battle of Hunain and the Islamization of Arabia

After the conquest of Mecca, Muhammad directed his military commanders to various destinations to spread his religion — always at the point of sword, if necessary. While they were pursuing the proselytizing campaigns, some mountain tribes united to check the growing power of Islam and its founder, which threatened their existence. The town of Taif also prepared itself to stay free from Muslims.

Placing the overall command of this force in the hands of one of their own, the chiefs of the non-Muslim tribes agreed to assemble at the valley of Autas, between Hunain and Taif, to launch their attack on Muslims. To ensure fidelity to the cause, participating members were asked to bring their women, children, and cattle. Four thousand of them came as directed, their number and belongings crowding the camp. Unwittingly, the Bedouins turned this site into a tempting target for the predatory soldiers of Islam.

As in the past, Muhammad's spies learned of the tribes' plans and he decided to storm them with his force of 12,000 men who were willing to perform any task as long as it offered them booty, or Paradise.

Mounting his favorite white mule Duldul — another gift from Muquaqis, ruler of Alexandria — Muhammad led his troops into the mountains. While approaching the enemy camp, he came to a deep valley in the confines of Hunain. As the Muslim forces poured into the valley, their opponents suddenly sprang out from the hills on both sides and charged down on the unsuspecting raiders. Struck with panic, Muslims turned and fled. As Muhammad later scolded:

"*Assuredly Allah did help you in many battlefields and on the day of Hunain: Behold! Your great numbers elated you, but they*

availed you naught: The land, for all that is wide, did constrain you, and ye turned back in retreat." [Q 9:25]

When all seemed lost, Muhammad's uncle al-Abbas, known to have strong lungs, issued a shout that echoed through the narrow valley. The fugitives heard his voice, rallied, and threw themselves into a bloody fray. This story bears all the earmarks of legend, but it may be a storyteller's simplification of actual events. Possibly al-Abbas or someone caught up with the fleeing troops, told them that their allies, the killer angels, were ready for battle and enraged at them, reminded the soldiers of the delights of Paradise, and convinced them to return.

Muslims' three-to-one numerical superiority soon began to tell. They brought the Pagans to a halt and then drove them back, and finally made them break and flee. The chiefs of the escaping troops and some accomplices took shelter in the city of Taif, while others retreated to their camps in the valley of Autas.

Muslims won the Battle of Hunain because, according to the Quran, Allah had helped them with his invisible soldier-angels, [Q 9:26] without whom they would have lost it. The Quran does not mention how many angels took part in this combat. At Badr, as we have noted, he said these angels existed simply for moral support. Why they would fight at Hunain and not at Badr— and obviously not at Uhud— is unknown to us.

Muhammad stayed in the valley and dispatched some of his lieutenants with a strong force to take over the enemy's camps. After fierce fighting, Muslims won here. The capture furnished the victors with magnificent booty, consisting— as the Arabian writers say— of 24,000 camels, 40,000 sheep, 4,000

ounces of silver, and 6,000 captives, most of them young females.

At this period in time, some Muslim soldiers found their consciences pricked with a moral question. Though they had the reputation of committing lewd acts at whim, they asked Muhammad how they could have sex with those captive women who were married and had husbands in confinement elsewhere without committing adultery.

Muhammad had no instant answer. As in his difficult moments, he waited and later produced a declaration, in the name of Allah, that eased their moral qualms. It forbade Muslim men from having sex with free married women, but permitted — nay, encouraged—them to do so with female captives in war even if they were married. Even now, Islam permits Muslims to enslave and rape the women of their foes.

The moral issue thus solved, Muhammad set out after the fugitive chiefs who had taken refuge in Taif. On seeing the city, he recalled how its people had once humiliated and expelled him. Vengeance overtook him and he stormed the town and its strong, protective walls. Here, for the first time, he used catapults devised by the genius Salman al-Farsi. But its defenders put up a stout resistance to Muhammad's fierce attack. When he failed to flush the beleaguered Pagans from within the walls, he decided to lay siege to the city.

To compel the trapped enemies to surrender, Muhammad laid waste to their fields, orchards, and vineyards. At the same time, he announced the emancipation of all the slaves, in the hope they would desert the city. However, these efforts bore him no fruit and he was disappointed.

The siege continued for 20 days, during which Muhammad spent most of his time in prayer and between the tents of the

two wives who accompanied him on the campaign (we presume the Muslim commanders will have their wives join them in battles they may launch against the infidels in the future!). His prayers, however, failed to induce intervention from the Gardens and despite his efforts he could not take Taif by force.

Muhammad's patience finally ran out and he broke the siege, promising his troops to conquer Taif at a future date.

They journeyed to the place called Jirana where the spoils and the captives from his previous expedition waited. He distributed them among his soldiers, retaining one fifth for him and Allah. But bowing to political expediency, Muhammad subsequently restored his share of the booty to the people from whom they were seized. Allah retained His share for His enjoyment!

From the camp at Jirana, Muhammad rode into Mecca and again performed his lesser pilgrimage. He then returned to Medina, leaving Mecca's affairs in the hands of his appointed governor.

Muhammad remained in Medina for seven months, during which time he witnessed the death of his daughter Zainab and the surprise birth of Ibrahim from his Coptic slave-girl Maria Qibtia. If he hadn't died at 15 months, this child would have been heir to an empire and his mere existence would have changed the face of Islam today.

The denouement in Taif — in a sense, the conclusion of the Battle of Hunain — came a year later, in 631. Defiant fugitives in Taif persisted in worshipping the idol of *al-Lat*. Though they were safe within the strong walls, Muslims drove them into greater and greater isolation. After many months, they found themselves compelled to send ambassadors to Muhammad,

entreating him for a pact of peace. He was delighted by their approach, but declined to grant them any concession; instead, he insisted on their unqualified submission and conversion. Completely at his mercy, they bowed to his demands and willy-nilly embraced Islam to save themselves from death and destruction.

Overall, Muslims' success at Hunain brought almost the entire population of the Arabian Peninsula into the fold of Islam, making them the dominant force of the land. A small number of the Pagans who had not yet become Muslims, would soon have a brief time to do so or face certain death at the hands of their Muslim neighbors. [Q 9:5] Therefore, the question is: Why did Muhammad have to remind Muslims of what had happened in Hunain?

We believe that even after defeating the Pagans and capturing the Ka'aba, Muslims knew that many Pagans harbored resentment against them and this fact made them extremely nervous. Muhammad needed to bolster the low morale of his soldiers and he used a method that had worked for him in the past: Allah's promise of angelic help from heaven. We find no other reason for Muhammad to comment on an event that had already taken place and after he had built up a massive army of 12,000 men — a size he would soon surpass with a much bolder venture.

Muhammad Shakes His Fist at the World

Having consolidated his position by persuasion, lies, and killing, Muhammad began to spread his sphere of influence to more distant territories. He sent envoys to various princes and potentates with invitations to embrace the faith of Islam. In effect, Muhammad wanted them to acknowledge that his

apostolic position made him superior to them. Of the numerous missions, three merit mention here.

Muhammad sent separate envoys to Khosru II, the king of Persia, and Heraclius, the Roman emperor at Constantinople. Khosru was the less astute and diplomatic of the two. When he received the letter, he flew into a rage, tore it into pieces, and ordered his viceroy in the Yemen to restore this "madman of the tribe of Quraish" to his senses. He deeply resented Muhammad's audacity in asking him to renounce his ancestral religion in favor of Islam. On what material the letter was written is unknown.

Heraclius received his call more favorably, perhaps because of the current reverses in his fortunes. He reportedly placed the epistle respectfully on his pillow and, after showing courtesy to the envoy, dismissed him with splendid presents.

Muhammad's third mission was to Muquaqis, the ruler of Alexandria. Muquaqis was a clever, tactful man and knew well how to handle such a matter as this one. He received the envoy kindly and, after ascertaining from him Muhammad's likes and dislikes, he concluded that the Prophet of Islam immensely enjoyed the company of beautiful young girls. As we have seen, the ruler sent to him the two Coptic sisters named Maria and Shiren Qibtia, together with other precious gifts, intending these to divert Muhammad's attention from his country and rule.

March towards Byzantium

With the varied enticements he offered his followers, Muhammad could now inspire them to throw themselves into any struggle that might transfer power to him by any means — be it conversion or forceful subjugation. He thus issued orders, perhaps in October of 630 A.D, to assemble a force for

an expedition to the Byzantine frontier. But despite the people's absolute loyalty to him, this time his call failed to rouse much enthusiasm in his warriors, for they still remembered the havoc of the Battle of Mota.

The people had other reasons for apathy. One was the heat of the late summer October, which had parched the earth and dried up the springs and brooks. In addition, date-harvesting time would arrive when they were gone on their campaign. Dates were their staple food and they had to stay home to gather and store them when they ripened.

Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the Medinese leader who remained Muhammad's covert foe and had vowed to seize every opportunity to undermine his plans, allegedly planted these objections with great skill in people's minds. He is also believed to have urged the people not to take part in Muhammad's war efforts, putting forward myriad reasons, which they found sensible. As a result, the new call to arms suffered a series of setbacks.

Muhammad once again resorted to revelation and told the unwilling people of Medina of the crackling flames of Hell where they would dwell if they avoided the proposed raid on the pretext of the summer sun. Which heat did they prefer? This question had the desired effect, and many Muslims responded by giving him large sums of money and other valuables, in lieu of actual participation, to help him finance his expedition against the Byzantines.

Abdullah's alleged intrigues notwithstanding, Muhammad is reported to have gathered an army of 10,000 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers, both from Medina and the settlements of the desert, to march on the momentous mission. Appointing Ali the caretaker of Medina, he left the city with his army and

pitched camp at Farewell Pass, just north of Medina where expeditions traditionally assembled before setting out for Syria. Abdullah and his adherents accompanied Muhammad's convoy, but set up their tents at some distance in the rear. When Muhammad marched forward next morning, Abdullah first lagged behind and then led his troops back to Medina.

Undeterred by Abdullah's defection, the Muslim army continued toward its destination, braving the extreme heat and other difficulties of the desert. At last, the convoy reached Tabuk, a small town within the Byzantine Empire, about halfway between Medina and Damascus. Here, the commander-in-chief ordered a halt. He pitched his tent near a fountain, and after refreshing himself, he sent his lieutenants to nearby principalities to enforce Islam or exact tribute. Some princes acknowledged the divinity of Muhammad's mission or submitted to his temporal dominion. Defiant ones were forced into obedience.

When the army was bringing some neighboring territories under his sway, Muhammad received intelligence that a massive Byzantine army was waiting at the border of the Empire to confront his forces. The report disheartened his troops and he left Tabuk for Medina without realizing his ardent desire. It was an embarrassing ending. The all-consuming power of Allah, the battalions of angels, the lure of Paradise— none of it had worked against a mere empire.

Tabuk, Jews, and Bedouins: Exegesis

After Tabuk, Muhammad busied himself with public as well as his domestic affairs. When the sacred month of pilgrimage knocked at the door, he sent a large contingent of Medinese pilgrims to Mecca under the leadership of Abu Bakr to perform their hajj. Soon after the delegation left,

Muhammad decided to announce an important message to the large congregation of pilgrims at the Ka'aba to ensure its wide circulation. He summoned his son-in-law Ali and asked him to rush to Mecca and arrive before the pilgrims dispersed. Ali mounted the fastest dromedary available and reached Mecca in time. He stood up before the multitude and read the proclamation in which Muhammad declared Islam, in all its vigor, to be the Religion of Sword.

According to the announcement, after a four-month period Muhammad would be free of all responsibility toward the idolaters, and he would attack, kill, and plunder them wherever he and Muslims found them. Ties of blood and friendship were to be discarded, and Muhammad barred Unbelievers from holding communion with their nearest relatives and dearest friends unless the polytheists renounced idolatry. The declaration also forbade Unbelievers from treading the sacred grounds of Mecca and entering the temple of Allah, a prohibition that remains in force to this day.

When the returning pilgrims spread the news that Muhammad has declared war with the aim of killing all polytheists, the remaining Pagan tribes grew alarmed and thronged the gates of Medina seeking conversion to Islam. Envoys also poured in from distant tribes and potentates, some submitting to his apostolic mission, others to his temporal authority. Muhammad sent his captains to subdue those idolatrous tribes that had remained outside his domain to bring them to the fold of Islam or to make them pay tribute. His gallant soldiers performed these duties in a short time, to his and Allah's fullest satisfaction.

Much of the message at Mecca that bred this upheaval lies in the ninth Sura, called Tauba, or Repentance. The British

historian Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," and its truth is on full display here. We also see Muhammad's fury and frustration after the setback at Tabuk.

Sura Tauba matters not just because of its violent, fiery nature, but also because Muslims have applied it to Jews. We will examine it to see if it could have come from the mouth of a perfect, all-knowing, kind, merciful, all-powerful Allah, the creator of the Universe and all that it contains, including us.

Allah begins the Sura by stating:

9:1: "*A (declaration) of immunity from Allah and His Apostle to those of the Pagans with whom ye have contracted mutual alliance*:"

9:2: "*Go ye, then, for four months, backwards and forwards, (as ye will), throughout the land, but know ye that ye cannot frustrate Allah (by your falsehood) but that Allah will cover with shame those who reject Him*."

9:3: "*And an announcement from Allah And His Apostle, to the people (assembled) on the day of the Great Pilgrimage,- that Allah and His Apostle dissolved (treaty) obligations with the Pagans. If, then, you repent, it were best for you; but if ye turn away, know ye that ye cannot frustrate Allah. And proclaim a grievous penalty to those who reject Faith*."

9:4: "(*But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against* you. *So fulfill your engagements with them to the end of their term: For Allah loveth the righteous*."

9:5: "*But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they*

repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: For Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."

9:6: "*If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure: That is because they are men without knowledge."*

Verse 9:1 is a preamble of a declaration granting immunity to the Pagans with whom Muslims had entered into mutual alliances. It was from Allah and His Apostle, though no verse in the Quran indicates that Allah had revealed this declaration to Muhammad through angel Gabriel or He put it into his mind through an inspiration.

The phrase "mutual alliance" is misleading, since Muhammad had created these on his own to blackmail the Pagans at times of his choosing. And any implication that Muslims who were like his servants had a say in making the alliances with the Pagans is also misleading, for they were silent spectators. [Only chiefs of tribes, clans, and religious groups took oaths and concluded treaties or covenants. So the question of the ordinary Muslims making alliances with the Pagans did not arise. [See Q 9:12]

Muhammad and Allah addressed verse 9:2 to the Pagans. They told them that they were free to roam the country for four months, but their lies would not fool Allah. If they deceived in any way or rejected Allah, He would shower them with shame. In other words, they had four months to either convert, pay *jizyah* (protection tax), or die.

The four are the lunar months of Shawwal, Zulqa'd, Zul-hajj, and Muharram. The ancient Pagan custom forbade warfare and killing in these months, as they were sacred to

them. [This is also asserted in verse 9:34] Showing respect for their custom, Allah and Muhammad forbade Muslims from murdering the Pagans in these months.

In verse 9:3, Allah and His Apostle apparently notified the pilgrims, assembled at Mecca for hajj, that both of them dissolved their treaty obligations with the Pagans, so it was best for you — the pilgrims — to repent. But if you tried to frustrate Allah by turning away from Him, a terrible punishment awaited.

The reader may ask: Why did Allah and Muhammad ask Muslims to "repent," when the contents of verse 9:3 were clearly intended for the Pagans, and when they were not supposed to be in the congregation of Muslim pilgrims? And why should they dissolve the treaties with some of the Pagans?

In fact, both Allah and Muhammad misphrased their declaration. They meant to say, "We have dissolved those treaties that the Pagans violated, and they will do best to repent" or they will die. Instead, they gave the impression we have noted.

The linguistic error aside, we find it interesting that Allah and Muhammad made this announcement before a crowd of Muslims, instead of making it known directly to the Pagans. So did Allah and Muhammad mean to incite the assembled Muslims against the Pagans, making latter's' lives unbearable and unsafe? Or did they want to warn Muslims that leaving Islam was a poor idea? Or did they intend both?

Verse 9:4 tells Muslims that treaties with Pagans who had honored their terms in all particulars — and also, intriguingly, who had not aided anyone against Muhammad and Muslims— are to remain intact. Muslims were to fulfill their

treaty obligations towards these Pagans, for Allah loves the righteous.

In verse 9:5, Muhammad orders Muslims to fight and kill the Pagans wherever they may be found, after the four-month moratorium. He also instructs them to seize the Pagans, besiege them, and lie in wait everywhere for them. But Muslims are to leave them alone if they repent — that is, convert— or pay the protection levy.

On its face, verse 9:5 orders conversion by force, and it describes how Muslims are to carry out the sacred slaughter for Allah. It also harmonizes with many other Quranic verses. But why did Allah have to issue commands resonant of a butcher, when He could have led the errant and unclean Pagans to His righteous path just by saying, "Be guided"? And, why did He resort to such a low and bloody human strategy when He had such sublime powers?

But did He really have those powers? We have looked and looked for hard, reliable evidence of them. If Allah had told Muhammad, "There are more planets beyond Saturn," and insisted that this utterance appear in the Quran, we might pause. Since no telescopes existed then, this revelation would have been hard to fake and we would reasonably ask how Muhammad alone could have known it. If Allah had told Muhammad that a vast ocean existed on the other side of the earth, or that He had made all matters out of atoms, or diamonds were just another form of coal, we might pay attention. But Allah never transcends Muhammad's culture in this way, and His miracles are always the kind people might invent. Allah needed human strategies because He and Muhammad were one.

In verse 9:6, Allah and Muhammad notified Muslims that if any Pagan during a fight or war asked for an opportunity to understand Islam, they should give it to him. If he has grasped it but refused to embrace it, they should escort him to a place where he could be secured. That is because those Pagans who sought an opportunity to understand Islam were "men without knowledge," that is to say: They had not heard enough about Islam and what it stood for. A Pagan who comes to Dar-al-Islam (the House of Islam) and obtains protection from Muslims is called *musta'min* in the Islamic Code. He cannot, however, approach the mosques, as all the Pagans are truly "unclean." [Quran, 9:28]

Allah/Muhammad spent almost 23 years of his life subduing, killing, and converting the Pagans, Jews and Christians of His holy land to Islam, and when he saw himself become its dictator-king, he sealed the fate and the future of those non-Muslims who survived his carnage by declaring:

9:29: "*Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth {Islam}, (even if they are) of the People of the Book {i.e. Jews and Christians}, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*"

Here, Muhammad set forth a list of victims for Muslims to slay ("fight" means that):

(1) Unbelievers in Allah, or even in the Last Day, 2) the tolerant, who allow what Allah and His Apostle have banned, and 3) Unbelievers, unless they pay the *jizyah* or "protection tax" and willingly accept Muslims' supremacy over them. It was "a notable declaration of State policy," [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *op. cit*. vol. 1, p. 436] which Muhammad pursued in his

own lifetime and which therefore set a precedent for his successors as well as for those Caliphs who were destined to rule the Muslim world, nay, the entire earth after it fell into their hands.

The protection tax was a means of raising money for the incipient empire. Christians and Jews could pay it and still practice their religion, but Muslims were exempt. It had another purpose too. In the words of Maududi, "They should be forced to pay *jizyah* in order to put an end to their independence and supremacy so that they should not remain rulers and sovereigns in the land. These powers should be wrested from them by the followers of the true Faith, who should assume the sovereignty and lead others towards the Right Way, while they should become their subjects and pay *jizyah*." Non-Muslims who live as *zimmis* ("protégés") in an Islamic state pay *jizyah* in exchange for the protection granted to them by its government. The tax also symbolizes the fact that they agree to live there as subjects, "with full consent so that they willingly become the subjects of the Believers, who perform the duty of the vicegerents of Allah on the earth."

The learned Maududi, like many scholars of his kind, was carried away by the olive branch in Muhammad or Allah's statement and, consequently, he has not only failed to pay attention to a glaring gap in the declaration, but even to understand what he was talking about. Let us make it clear.

It is true that the Pagans did not believe in the Last Day, but they did believe in Allah and the Quran has confirmed it (though they also believed in auxiliary deities without whom, they believed, they could not reach Allah). Jews and Christians also believed in Allah, but Jews' concept of Allah differed from that of Christians. The former did not believe that Allah had a

son or that Jesus Christ was the Messiah they were expecting from heaven; the latter believed that Christ was Allah's actual son and that he was the last Messiah mentioned in the Bible.

As we have noted, the Pagans, Jews, and Christians all believed in Allah. So why did Allah say they did not believe in Him?

Here, again, Allah erred: Like the Pagans, Jews and Christians did not believe in Muhammad. And since Allah was none other than Muhammad himself, he required Muslims to fight and kill those who disbelieved in him— not Him i.e. Allah. He failed to realize that by making this statement, he was exposing his secret to discerning readers of the Quran!

Now, let us point out the mistake Maududi was forced to make by his Islamic zeal. On one hand, he says, "They [the Pagans, Jews, and Christians] should be forced to pay *jizyah* in order to put an end to their independence and supremacy so that they should not remain rulers and sovereigns in the land." On the other, he says they pay *jizyah* "with full consent so that they willingly become the subjects of the Believers."

That is, they pay *jizyah* under duress yet with full consent. Maududi would not have made the mistake if he had considered this basic truth: When a person acts only under compulsion, he is never acting with his full consent. It's impossible by definition.

Maududi must have understood this simple fact, yet he made the absurd claim anyway, blinded by his Islamic fervor and its ill designs against those who were, the Quran told him, the enemies of his religion. It's an important phenomenon, since Maududi is hardly alone. Every day we see Muslims set

aside their common sense under the influence of the teachings of Islam.

By the decree of the Quran, all non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews, living in Islamic states today must pay *jizyah* to their rulers and live as "subjects" of Muslims, or their masters must kill them. In other words, the Muslims' subjects must live as subhumans, with their respect and dignity forfeited to their overlords. For that is what their creator has ordained in His anger at their worship of other gods besides Him.

Of course, the rulers of the Islamic countries are not now imposing the sanguinary requirements of verse 9:29 on their non-Muslim subjects, for at least two reasons. First, its inhumanity is impractical and will rouse the ire of the non-Muslim nations. Second, the Muslims rulers are often Muslims mainly in name; they do not follow most requirements of the Quran. And for their disobedience to Allah, all of them will roast forever in Hell.

However, Muslims and their rulers will be able to implement Allah's plan for the Unbelievers after they seize the planet through their sheer numbers and muscle power. The enemies of Allah will then have no place to hide, as Allah will search them out and help Muslims enslave or exterminate them. His earth will then become free of the odious tumult and oppressions they have always created on it.

Allah also said:

9:53: "*Say: "Spend (for the cause) willingly or unwillingly: Not from you will it be accepted: For ye are indeed a people rebellious and wicked*."

9:54: "*The only reason why their contributions are not accepted is: That they reject Allah and His Apostle; that they come to prayer without earnestness; and that they offer contributions unwillingly*."

As we have noted earlier, Jews of Medina had become Muhammad's *bêtes noirs* after they refused to accept him as the Messiah whom they were expecting from their own race. The rich ones also antagonized him by asking him, among others, to exempt them from fighting his many enemies so that they could stay home with their women. Their wealth and sons dazzled Muhammad, and may have made him jealous, since he had no sons of his own. Allah bolstered Muhammad's sagging morale by telling him that the wealth and the sons particularly of Jews were a liability for them, as He planned to punish them by giving these "things" to them in this world — a plan He executed vigorously soon after He disclosed it to His Prophet.

Had Jews of Medina been poor, would Allah have asked His Prophet to kill and expel them from their homes? Apart from their opposition to the ferocious Prophet, was it not their wealth that had led to their downfall?

At a later stage, some rich Jews who had escaped the fate their kindred had suffered from Muhammad realized they might survive longer if they kept him happy, and hence they sought to pacify him by contributing to his war chest. Remaining alert to Jews' thoughts and plans, Allah made His Prophet reject their contributions on the grounds He mentioned in verse 9:54.

With their lives at stake, many wealthy Jews converted to Islam. The stubborn ones did not discard their religion; instead, they paid the *jizyah* to Muhammad and lived the lives of the *zimmis* or protégés of Muslims.

This unexpected development was not a happy one for Muhammad. Allah's earlier dictum boomeranged, jeopardizing his plans to reduce Jews to beggary. He wanted to place them in the very circumstances in which they had found him in his early days in Medina. But how could he seize their goods, when they had fully complied with Allah's declaration? Would it not look brazen to simply steal their property?

To help Muhammad overcome his difficulty, Allah came up with a brilliant idea. It required Him to accuse the unconverted Jews — and some unconverted Christians as well — of being rebellious and wicked. Since their character was so low, the Prophet could take over their possessions. Allah also helped him seize the property of Jews and Christian who had actually converted to Islam by accusing them of being less than earnest in their prayers and of paying their war contributions reluctantly. After they lost everything to Muhammad, Allah offered them His typical exhilarating consolations:

"Allah hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): They fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: A promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law [the Torah], the Gospel [the Bible], and the Quran: And who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: That is the achievement supreme." [Q 9:111]

Whether or not the pauper Believers — that is, the former Jews and Christians —rejoiced in the bargain they had made with Allah is not known. Nor is known if the capricious Allah ("who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah?") kept His

promise by placing them in the Gardens of Paradise after their death.

Allah instructed Muhammad to act firmly against the Unbelievers and the hypocrites. He reminded the Prophet that some of them had concluded a covenant with Him, which required that, if He bestowed His bounty on them, they would spend it in alms and live righteously. How they could have concluded a covenant with Allah is unknown to us, as nobody has ever been able to locate even one copy of this contract. However, though He kept His part of the deal, they became greedy and broke their part. Hence Allah admitted:

9:77: *"So He hath put as a consequence hypocrisy into their hearts, (to last) till the Day whereon they shall meet Him: Because they broke their Covenant with Allah, and because they lied (again and again)."*

The people Allah had in mind were Jews of Medina. They broke the covenant, which they had concluded with Him. It required them to spend their wealth on charity, but they reneged when Muhammad aka Allah appeared in their midst and demanded that they keep their part of the bargain. Since Allah, at the time He made this statement, was incapable of enforcing the covenant, He turned them into hypocrites. They were to endure this invisible punishment until the Day of Judgment, when they would meet Him to account for their conduct.

What are we to make of this episode? If Allah made them hypocrites, they would probably give even less to charity in the future. He could have simply made them more generous and solved the problem, but He preferred to lower their character on earth and set them up for endless agony in the world hereafter. That was extremely uncharitable.

And since He acted so uncharitably in alleged defense of charity, can't we say that Allah was a hypocrite Himself?

In fact, Allah's hypocrisy pervades the Quran. Most Suras begin with an indication that Allah is telling Muhammad what to say, yet they abound with claims like "Allah is Most Compassionate, Most Wise." Allah is therefore describing Himself, or rather telling Muhammad how to describe him. How many genuinely wise people boast of their wisdom to others? And what do we call a bloodthirsty individual who repeatedly insists that he is merciful and compassionate?

Allah attacks hypocrisy again and again in the Quran, but since He also commits it endlessly and without shame, He is the most striking offender. Indeed, hypocrisy is the curse of the Quran. Allah's punishment of Jews illustrates the point, for if He genuinely loathed the hypocrites, He would not have added to their number here on earth. This was the kind of act we might expect from Satan, who derives his power of deception from Allah, and if anyone deserved punishment here, it was Allah Himself.

Of course, Allah exercised total power over the minds and thoughts of people, so why didn't He just make Jews fulfill their promise, thereby most mercifully sparing them the torments of Hell? In fact, why did He need a promise from them at all? A human ruler would have, but not Allah. And given Allah's infinite powers, is it farfetched to suggest that He made these Jews break their promise so He could torture them after judging them on the Day of Judgment?

Incidentally, Islam always had problems with the Muslim hypocrites, as one might expect in a creed where dissembling may be essential to save one's life. Hypocrites existed in the

time of Muhammad and they tried to kill him. They still exist in all the Muslim communities. Ibn Kathir states:

"It was reported that some hypocrites plotted to kill the Prophet, while he was at the battle of Tabuk, riding one night. They were a group of more than ten men. In his book *Dala'il An-Nubuwah*, Al-Hafiz Abu Bakr Al-Bayhaqi recorded that Hudhaifa bin Al- Yaman said, 'I was holding the bridle of the Messenger's camel while `Ammar was leading it, or vice versa. When we reached Al-Aqaba, twelve riders intercepted the Prophet. When I alerted the Messenger, he shouted at them and they all ran away.'

"The Messenger of Allah said: 'Among my Companions are twelve hypocrites who will never enter Paradise or find its scent, until the camel enters the eye of the needle. Eight of them will be struck by the Dubaylah [a missile made of fire that appears between their shoulders and pierces their chest]. This is why Hudhaifa was called the holder of the secret, for he knew who these hypocrites were, since the Messenger of Allah gave their names to him and none else."

When Abdullah ibn Ubayy, Muhammad's long enemy and the "Chief of the Hypocrites," as he called him, fell sick and died, Muhammad followed his dead body to the grave and prayed to Allah for forgiveness of his sins. On being remonstrated by Omar for praying for a hypocrite, Muhammad had Allah tell him:

9:80: "*Whether thou ask for their forgiveness or not, (their sin is unforgivable): If thou ask seventy times for their forgiveness, Allah will not forgive them: Because they have rejected Allah and His Apostle; and Allah guideth not those who are perversely rebellious*."

Muhammad's statement, if true, was hypocritical itself. On one hand, he says "Allah forgives all sins," [Cf. Q 39:53] on the

other, he says some sins are unforgivable. We can only reconcile these statements by assuming moodiness on Allah's part. Some days He forgives everything and other days He doesn't.

Muhammad knew the deceased Abdullah was a hypocrite and Allah does not forgive a hypocrite, yet he prayed for his forgiveness in the hereafter. We believe he intended his act as mere show for those who knew of his ruthlessness, hoping to soften their attitude towards him. But the key question is: Did Allah forgive Muhammad's hypocrisy? We see no evidence of it, and given Muhammad's blanket immunity from Allah's laws, we are not surprised.

In fact, of course, Allah does not hate all hypocrisy equally. He really hates just a special kind: Those who pretend that He exists. This deceit could hardly be a concern for an all-powerful, all-knowing Allah — though it would pose a dire threat to a human ruler like Muhammad who might find himself betrayed and killed by those he trusted. Indeed, Allah well knew that He Himself existed and could have proven the fact to human beings whenever He wanted. If anything, we would expect disbelief to amuse Him, not anger Him. He could also have pointed out the true hypocrites to Muhammad at any time and relieved his anxiety, but He didn't bother.

In this Sura, Allah made it crystal clear that He would not forgive those who rejected Him and His Apostle even if he prayed for them constantly. Muslims still obey this injunction and do not pray and mourn at the graveside of the infidels today. They do not attend the funerals of non-Muslims even if they had been their relatives, or had been exceptionally kind and generous to them in life. And on hearing of the death of the Unbelievers, especially the

Hindus, most Muslims pray to Allah to send them to the eternal fire of Hell!

Of today's world population of over 6.5 billion, only about 1.4 billion believe in Muhammad and his Allah. In most cases, the Unbelievers grew up in families and areas where believing in Muhammad and his Allah would have been very difficult if not impossible. Often, they have never met a Muslim or even learned of the existence of the Quran. None of these facts matter to Allah. Ignorance is no excuse. Impossibility of belief is no excuse. Solely because they lack belief in Allah and the Prophet they may never have heard of, over 5.1 billion people deserve oblivion. Moreover, Muslims must punish and kill them where possible, and Allah will bring out His torturer's devices for them in the world hereafter.

We do not believe that Allah was in His senses when He had made such comments. No reasonable man can hate his offspring. So how could a kind and merciful Allah— as He repeatedly characterizes Himself — have created so many people to be the objects of His intense hatred?

Next, Muhammad reviles the Bedouins, possibly because he was disappointed with them at Tabuk. He always detested these independent nomads of the desert. Here are a few things he had said about them:

9:97: "*The Arabs of the desert are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy, and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which Allah hath sent to His Apostle: But Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise*."

9:98: "*Some of the desert Arabs look upon their payments as a fine, and watch for disasters for you: On them be the disasters of Evil: For Allah is He that heareth and knoweth (all things)*."

9:99: "*But some of the desert Arabs believe in Allah and the Last Day and look to their payments as pious gifts bringing them nearer to Allah, and obtaining the prayers of the Apostle. Aye, indeed they bring them nearer (to Him): Soon will Allah admit them to His Mercy: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful*."

These verses make it clear that Allah/Muhammad prided himself on being a town-dweller and despised the Bedouins because of their freedom. This hatred made him curse them and call them the hypocritical "Arabs of the desert," thereby distinguishing his own Arab identity from theirs. He hated them because of their lifestyle. He wished they did not exist, but since they did, he cursed them and distanced himself from them. Whether Allah will forgive them after death for their hypocrisy is not known to us.

Historically, the Bedouins had been autonomous and they disliked the subservience Muhammad was trying to impose on them. Nor were they inclined to accept the religion he wanted them to follow, which exalted him. Hence Muhammad had to struggle hard to bring them to the fold of Islam and force them to pay alms "to suppress the unseemly beggary and loathsome importunity" of Muslims. The Bedouins did not like paying alms, or gifts, as they themselves were poor and could barely survive on the meager resources at their disposal. Unable to resist his pressure, they wished his downfall.

Because the Bedouins had protested against blatant wrongs, Allah aka Muhammad blamed them for an array of problems. He also threatened them with the typical dual punishments: One group on earth, another in the hereafter. Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains it thus: "Their punishment in the world was double, viz., not only in their discomfiture, but

because in their obstinate ignorance they failed to understand the accomplished facts, while cleverer men realized, that their hostility to Islam was hopeless. In addition to their discomfiture in this life, they would have to meet the spiritual penalties to come." [*The Holy Quran*, vol. 1, p. 532, note 1351]

Ali's explanation clearly states that Allah was coercive ("hostility to Islam was hopeless") to the desert Arabs and suggests that He used repulsive tactics to convert them to Islam. Yet we are told that the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula accepted Islam because of its promoter's peaceful nature and humane teachings!

The three verses above draw our attention to other important aspects of Allah's behavior:

1) He required them only to believe in Him and the Last Day, whereas He had required the Jews to believe in Him, His Apostle, and the Last Day.

2) Payment of alms or gifts to Muhammad by the desert Arabs made the Prophet happy, even though they had not acknowledged him as the Apostle of Allah, and he prayed to Him on their behalf. Allah indicated acceptance of the tribute by telling Muhammad that what the gift-givers provided Muhammad was a means to bring them nearer to Him and to His (the Apostle's) prayer. Soon after they became nearer to Allah, He would admit them to His mercy.

3) Allah decided to forgive their resistance to Islam, because they had given gifts to Muhammad. Whether the gifts came in cash or kind is not recorded in the Quran.

4) Even when the Bedouins unwillingly gave their alms or gifts to Muhammad, Allah took no violent action against them, nor did He kill any for their hypocrisy. Instead, He promised

them mercy, despite the fact that they considered the payment of gifts to be an unjustified and illegal fine imposed on them by Allah, watched hopefully for disasters to befall His Prophet, and admitted their guilt in mixing their good deeds with the bad ones.

Why was Allah so lenient?

The Bedouins were not rich like Jews of Medina, so Allah would have gained nothing by killing them. As a result, He treated them humanely and left them to themselves after labeling them the "worst hypocrites and worst in unbelief."

Allah made it repeatedly known that He had already prepared the Gardens as a perpetual pleasure grounds for Muslims who fled with Muhammad to Medina and for those Medinese who gave them aid and nobly followed them. Allah also asked Muhammad to tell his listeners:

9:105: "And say: "*Work (righteousness): Soon will Allah observe your work, and His Apostle, and the Believers: Soon will ye be brought back to the Knower of what is hidden and what is open: then will He show you the truth of all ye did*.""

Muslims use this verse, and others like it, for emphasizing that Islam does, indeed, require its adherents to work hard on earth for improving the standard of their life. For them the word "righteousness" — added to the verse by the translator — means "hard work!"

But a close reading of the verse reveals a different story. In fact, it relates to payment of tribute, which Muhammad had demanded from the poor Muslims and non-Muslim Bedouins of the desert.

Finding that the Bedouins were unwilling to hand over to him and his followers most of their possessions, Muhammad urged them to act swiftly and fully on his demand.

Allah, His Apostle, and his followers closely watched their response. He also told them it would be futile to try to conceal the extent of their possessions to avoid giving hefty alms to Muslims, for Allah would quickly learn what they had hidden and make them face His wrath. The claim that this verse says otherwise is simply false.

Concerning the Bedouin Muslims, Allah also said:

9:106: "*There are (yet) others, held in suspense for the command of Allah, whether He will punish them, or turn in mercy to them: and Allah is All-Knowing, Wise*."

Abul Ala Maududi explains this verse thus: "The case of these people had been deferred because it could not yet be legally decided whether they were sinners or hypocrites and not because their case was doubtful in the sight of Allah. This was because the symptoms of their diseases had not as yet come to the surface to indicate clearly which of the two they were. For, Islam teaches the Muslims not to pass judgment on a person or a party unless they possess definite knowledge based on conscious reasoning and not on intuition and the like to support it."

In the same breath, Allah claims omniscience yet confesses ignorance. He says He deferred punishment of some Bedouin Muslims because He did not yet know whether they were sinners or hypocrites, for the symptoms had not become clear to Him. Of course, He cannot be both all-knowing and partially-knowing. But human beings, like the Prophet of Islam, often remain in "suspense" about the moral worth of other people. It is more so in case of fearful military and

civilian dictators; they suffer from more suspense than their oppressed victims.

The Sura continues:

9:123: "O ye who believe! Fight the Unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you: And know that Allah is with those who fear Him."

We read a near-identical command in verses 47:4 and 66:9; Allah urging Muslims to initiate attacks (Jihad in Arabic) against the Unbelievers — that is, Jews and the hypocrites in Medina — to create a safe haven for them and their Prophet. This is clear from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's comment on verse 9:123: "When conflict becomes inevitable, the first thing is to clear our surroundings of all evil, for it is only evil that we can rightly fight. To evil we must put up a stout and stiff resistance. Mealy-mouthed compromises are not right for soldiers of truth and righteousness. They are often a compound of cowardice, greed, and corruptibility."

Allah issued this command to Muhammad in the 7th century, yet it remains in force. Following it, Muslims of our time wish to kill their enemies and cleanse the surroundings of their presence, since adherence to Allah's commandments, belligerent or otherwise, is what makes them Muslims. Yet they have failed and continue to fail to carry out His command to indiscriminately kill their enemies, for several reasons.

In the past, Jews and the hypocrites not only surrendered to Muslims, but became the proverbial geese that laid the golden eggs. Especially when the illiterate but ferocious Arabs conquered foreign territories, and imposed levies on non-Muslims to support their states. Killing these taxpayers was hardly in their economic interest.

And today, Muslims lack the power to kill them, and the world conscience would revolt if they tried. The global outcry about al-Qaeda after 9/11, and the near-universal support for the invasion of Afghanistan and the ouster of the Taliban demonstrate the point.

Yet many Muslims and their leaders continue trying their best, overtly or covertly, to gain the power to carry out Allah's orders. Forgetting what Muslims had done to Jews, Christians, Hindus, and others during their 1100-year rule over a vast swath of the earth, and stressing that the present-day Muslims are the victims of injustice and oppression, especially from the Europeans and Jews, Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad candidly and categorically told his brethren-in-faith:

"There is a feeling of hopelessness among the Muslim countries and their people. They feel that they can do nothing right. They believe that things can only get worse. The Muslims will forever be oppressed and dominated by the Europeans and the Jews. They will forever be poor, backward, and weak. Some believe, as I have said, this is the Will of Allah, that the proper state of the Muslims is to be poor and oppressed in this world. "But is it true that we should do and can do nothing for ourselves? Is it true that 1.3 billion people can exert no power to save themselves from the humiliation and oppression inflicted upon them by a much smaller enemy? Can they only lash back blindly in anger? Is there no other way than to ask our young people to blow themselves up and kill people and invite the massacre of more of our own people?

"It cannot be that there is no other way. 1.3 billion Muslims cannot be defeated by a few million Jews. There must be a way. And we can only find a way if we stop to think, to assess our weaknesses and our strength, to plan, to strategise and then to counter attack. As Muslims we must seek guidance from the Al-Quran and the Sunnah

of the Prophet. Surely the 23 years' struggle of the Prophet can provide us with some guidance as to what we can and should do.

"We know he and his early followers were oppressed by the Quraish. Did he launch retaliatory strikes? No. He was prepared to make strategic retreats. He sent his early followers to a Christian country and he himself later migrated to Madinah. There he gathered followers, built up his defense capability and ensured the security of his people. At Hudaibiya he was prepared to accept an unfair treaty, against the wishes of his companions and followers. During the peace that followed he consolidated his strength and eventually he was able to enter Mecca and claim it for Islam. Even then he did not seek revenge. And the peoples of Mecca accepted Islam and many became his most powerful supporters, defending the Muslims against all their enemies.

"That briefly is the story of the struggle of the Prophet. We talk so much about following the Sunnah of the Prophet. We quote the instances and the traditions profusely. But we actually ignore all of them. …

"We are actually very strong. 1.3 billion people cannot be simply wiped out. The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them.

"We may not be able to do that. We may not be able to unite all the 1.3 billion Muslims. We may not be able to get all the Muslim governments to act in concert. But even if we can get a third of the ummah and a third of the Muslim states to act together, we can already do something. Remember that the Prophet did not have many followers when he went to Madinah. But he united the Ansars and the Muhajirins and eventually he became strong enough to defend Islam.

"Apart from the partial unity that we need, we must take stock of our assets. I have already mentioned our numbers and our oil wealth.

In today's world we wield a lot of political, economic and financial clout, enough to make up for our weakness in military terms. …

"We must build up our strength in every field, not just in armed might. Our countries must be stable and well administered, must be economically and financially strong, industrially competent and technologically advanced. This will take time, but it can be done and it will be time well spent. We are enjoined by our religion to be patient. Innallahamaasabirin. Obviously there is virtue in being patient.

"But the defense of the ummah, the counter attack need not start only after we have put our houses in order. Even today we have sufficient assets to deploy against our detractors. It remains for us to identify them and to work out how to make use of them to stop the carnage caused by the enemy. This is entirely possible if we stop to think, to plan, to strategise and to take the first few critical steps. Even these few steps can yield positive results. ...

"The enemy will probably welcome these proposals and we will conclude that the promoters are working for the enemy. But think. We are up against a people who think. They survived 2000 years of pogroms not by hitting back, but by thinking. They invented and successfully promoted Socialism, Communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so they may enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have now gained control of the most powerful countries and they, this tiny community, have become a world power. We cannot fight them through brawn alone. We must use our brains also. …

"There are many things that we can do. There are many resources that we have at our disposal. What is needed is merely-the will to do it, As Muslims, we must be grateful for the guidance of our religion, we must do what needs to be done, willingly and with determination. Allah has not raised us, the leaders, above the others so we may enjoy power for ourselves only. The power we wield is for our people, for

the ummah, for Islam. We must have the will to make use of this power judiciously, prudently, concertedly. Inshallah we will triumph in the end." [Excerpt from his speech before the 'Organization of Islamic Conference' (OIC) held in Malaysia on Oct. 16, 2003.]

In line with Mahathir's candid and forceful advice, Iran is doing everything in its power to acquire a nuclear capability. The number of Muslims is rapidly increasing.

Eventually a time will come when most of the real and perceived hurdles Muslims face today will disappear. Then many of them will try to execute their pledge-bound act: The elimination of Jews and other non-Muslims from the face of the earth, so that they can have it all to themselves. Allah will help them in their carnage, and make them the rulers of the earth, as He had helped His true followers in the past. [The Quran, 24:55]

Why global conquest should matter to Muslims when their true rewards lie in the afterlife is unclear to us.

The Quran makes it clear that Muhammad's revelations had little persuasive impact on many Unbelievers. It reports:

9:124: "Whenever there cometh down a Sura, some of them say: "Which of you has had his faith increased by it?" Yea, those who believe, — their faith is increased, and they do rejoice."

9:125: "But those in whose hearts is a disease, — it will add doubt to their doubt, and they will die in a state of Unbelief."

9:126: "See they not that they are tried every year once or twice? Yet they turn not in repentance, and they take no heed."

9:127: "Whenever there cometh down a Sura, they look at each other, (saying), "Doth anyone see you?" then they turn aside:

Allah hath turned their hearts (from the light); for they are a people that understand not."

9:128: "Now hath come unto you an Apostle from amongst yourselves: It grieves him that ye should perish: ardently anxious is he over you: To the Believers is he most kind and merciful."

Muhammad was clearly the speaker here. And since his words did not increase the Unbelievers' faith, those Unbelievers asked Muslims if that was the case with them as well. However, he did not let Muslims answer for themselves; instead; he told the Unbelievers that his revelations not only increased their faith, but made them rejoice with happiness.

Verse 9:126 introduces us to a coercive method Muhammad often used to convert the Medinese Unbelievers. Once or twice a year, he gathered them before him to find out if they were ready to repent and become Muslims. Finding themselves in an awkward situation before the prince of the city, the Unbelievers looked for ways to slip away, hoping nobody was watching them. They sought escape not knowing that Allah always placed Himself in their midst, listened to their words, and closely watched all of their actions. He also read their minds so that Muhammad could counter them appropriately.

Disappointed by their resistance, Muhammad often told them: Listen! I am an Apostle and I am also one of you. The prospect of your destruction grieves me. I am extremely anxious about you, as I am kind and merciful to the Believers — two attributes I share with Allah. From all evidence, the Unbelievers did not swallow his protestations of good-heartedness and resisted his effort to bring them under his control.

Farewell Pilgrimage and Death

Muhammad had now established his sway over all of Arabia, as the Arabian tribes accepted Islam2 and discarded Paganism. He had fought three major battles to establish Islam, though at any time Allah could have said, "Let it happen," and prevented death, pain and grief. Muhammad had also launched 65 raids to plunder his enemies and had taken part personally in 27. [Ibn Ishaq, pp. 659-60 ff]

Now he decided to perform his pilgrimage or hajj at the holy temple of Mecca, as the performer of hajj comes out "as sinless as a newly-born child (just delivered by his mother." [Sahih Bukhari; *Vol. 3, Book 28, Number 45*]

This announcement brought devotees to Medina from throughout Arabia to follow him on his pious mission. One day— some say it was *February 20, 632 A.D.* — Muhammad set out for Mecca with his nine wives. Around him an immense crowd of the faithful stretched as far as eye could see in every direction, some on foot and others mounted on camels. They journeyed 250 miles in the shimmering desert heat and finally reached the House of Allah to perform the antiquated rites, sans the idols of the past. As this was to be a model pilgrimage, Muhammad is believed to have rigorously observed all the ancient formalities of his ancestors, as well as those he himself had devised. Since he was in a frail health, he rode on the back of his favorite camel, as he circled the Ka'aba seven times and journeyed between the hills of Safa and Marwa.

The rites of hajj completed, Muhammad sacrificed 63 camels with his own hand, one for each year of his life. He then shaved his head and divided the shorn locks among his disciples. One eventually found its way to the Valley of

Kashmir in India, where Muslims today preserve and deeply revere it.

Muhammad preached frequently while in Mecca, and he is said to have laid down many doctrines, which he had neglected to mention earlier. He is also believed to have given numerous guidelines to his followers, many of which they failed to convey to the scribes who compiled the Quran. Consequently, Muslims observe many important rituals of their faith based not on the Quran, but on practices they themselves had come to know firsthand, or which came to them from their parents or mentors.

Back in Medina, Muhammad's mind turned once again to conquest and he issued orders to assemble an army for an expedition to Syria, proving our belief that the performance of hajj does not transform a Muslim sinner into a pious being as true. He appointed Osama, the 20-year-old son of Zaid, as its commander, and bade it farewell.

On the eve of the day Osama departed for Syria, Muhammad suffered a violent headache. He attributed the pain to the lingering effects of the poison a Jew of Khaybar had given him a long time ago. Vertigo and delirium also afflicted him, as they did in his paroxysms when he received his revelations from Allah.

When he felt slightly better, he retired to Aisha's apartment to tell her about his illness. It so happened that Aisha was also suffering from a headache that day.

On entering her room, he heard her moaning, "Oh, my head!"

"Nay, Aisha," said Muhammad, "it is my head!" He looked at her searchingly, seeking some sign of mortal sickness in her

face. Finding none, he said to the girl, "I wished that you died whilst yet I was alive, that I might ask forgiveness for thee and bury thee." Aisha retorted, "Yes, I know what you wish. You wish that I should die so that you could bring in a new wife in my place." [Martin Lings, *op. cit.*, p. 338] Amused by her teasing, he settled down in her room.

But Muhammad's headache intensified, and on the second day, as Allah gazed down with interest on his suffering, he developed fever and a serious pain in his stomach. When he felt a little better, others helped him to the mosque next to his residence. Here, he seated himself on the pulpit and addressed the congregation. In his final remarks, he asked, "Is there anyone from whom I have taken something and not paid it back? Let him come forward and be identified," At this, a man in the throng reminded him of an unpaid debt of three dinars of silver. Muhammad instantly repaid the loan with interest, without asking any questions.

If Muhammad actually did pay interest on this debt, he violated his own doctrine, [Q 2:275: *"Allah has permitted trading and made usury unlawful."*] which forbade giving and taking interest on a loan. But as we've seen so many times, Muhammad was free to ignore his own laws, no matter how wise.

After a few days of agony, with great pain and dementia, Muhammad breathed his last on Monday, **June 8, 632 A.D**, his head resting on Aisha's bosom! [Phillip K. Hitti, *op. cit.*, p. 119]

Modern researchers maintain that Muhammad had died while having or trying to have sex with Aisha. They cite the following Hadith in support of their assumption:

Narrated Aisha: *"He [Muhammad] died on the day of my usual turn (of having sex with him) at my house. Allah took him unto Him*

while his head was between my chest and my neck and his saliva was mixed with my saliva." [Sahih Bukhari. vol. 7, book 62, no. 144]

According to one Muslim account, the black magic of a Jew and his daughter had entered Muhammad. Under its influence, he remained almost insane until about the time of his death. Under this condition, he admitted doing things without doing them. His sufferings intensified with the onset of severe headache, and under intolerable conditions, he went from place to place in search of relief, but found none.

Recently, a Shia cleric claimed that Aisha and Hafsa murdered the Prophet on orders from their fathers Abu Bakr and Omar. The merits of this claim are unclear, but certainly the two women had the opportunity to kill him as well as strong motives to avenge the sufferings he was inflicting on them. But they failed to harm the Prophet, as Allah protected him with the help of Gabriel, all other angels, and the believing Muslims.

Curiously, Allah missed an opportunity here. He could have given Muhammad Vicodin or any one of the many painkillers now commonly available to people everywhere (and developed by Unbelievers). He would thus have shown true mercy to His favorite Prophet and given strong evidence of His existence. Instead, He let Muhammad suffer as few people would today, thus proving that Allah either did not want to help Muhammad or He did not have the ability to come to his aid.

Eventually, Muhammad discovered relief in his own revelations. They consisted of eleven verses, invocations, or statements. Through them, he sought refuge in the Lord alone (not the Lord and Himself, as he had done previously) from the mischief of His creation, from the mischief of the night's

darkness, from the mischief of the conjuring witches, from the mischief of the envier, from the mischief of slinking prompter who whispers in the hearts of men, and from Jinns. These extraordinary Suras convey Muhammad's sense of the dangers lurking all around him, crafted by Allah Himself (as acknowledged in "the mischief of His creation").

Eleven invocations removed eleven spells of the black magic and helped him briefly recover from his illness. He then fell sick again and died. Muhammad's body remained unburied in Aisha's room for three to seven days, according to varying reports, while his Companions contemplated a successor. They then turned their attention to his corpse. It was almost decomposed, emitting a foul odor. Hurriedly, they dug a hole in the floor of Aisha's room and buried him there "in the middle of the night of a Wednesday." In their haste to avoid the obnoxious air pollution, Muslims interred him without any of Islam's obligatory burial rites. The Companions' treatment of Muhammad's dead body proves a point we made earlier: They followed him not out of respect or conviction, but from fear and lust for power and wealth. By letting his body rot, his closest allies revealed their detestation for the very man whom a vast number of Muslims today believe to have been the best of men, sent to earth by Allah to ameliorate their lives in this world and the next!

But death would hardly be the end of him.

Part III: The Reveler

Muhammad In Paradise

Trial before Allah

In Islam, death is not the end of anyone. So what happened to Muhammad after he entered the grave?

If we now open up his tomb in Medina, we will find it empty. As the Day of Judgment has already taken place, Muhammad has abandoned his tomb and has taken up residence with Allah in the Garden on the topmost sky. Living under Allah's constant watch, he has been enjoying his life to the hilt. We do not know whether his wives have been able to join him in his celestial home, or they are burning in the fire of Hell. The Resurrection began dramatically. Telling Himself that His listeners must be waiting for a single blast that will overtake them while they were busy disputing His claim, Allah described the processes that will precede the Day of Judgment:

36:51*: "The trumpet shall be sounded, when behold! From the sepulchers (men) will rush forth to their Lord!*

36:52*: "They will say: 'Ah! Woes unto us! Who hath raised us up from our beds of repose?' (A voice will say:) 'This is what (Allah) Most Gracious had promised, and true was the word of the apostles!'"*

36:53: "*It will be no more than a single Blast, when lo! They will be brought up before Us!"*

36:54*: "Then, on that Day, not a soul will be wronged in the least, and ye shall but be repaid the meeds of your past deeds."*

Allah had, and still has, the power to create things and bring about events with the command "Be," [Cf. Q 36:82 et al] but He never used this power of His. Hence nothing in the world has come into existence, and no event has taken place, with the command "Be" from Him.

In the verses above, Allah tells His audience that the Day of Judgment will come sometime in future. Allah was incorrect, however, for this Day took place a long time ago and He judged His creations on that Day. We have drawn this conclusion from the doctrine of Islamic eschatology as well as from the verses of the Quran.

Consider that Islam teaches that, though martyrs enter the Gardens immediately after they die for Islam, the vast majority of Muslims will enter after Allah renders His verdict on the Day of Judgment. Thus, unlike the Gardens, Hell should be completely empty now. Sinful Muslims and all non-Muslims will troop in and begin suffering after their trial on the Day of Resurrection.

Keeping this doctrine in our mind, let us read what Allah has said in the Quran about the wives of the prophets Noah and Lut:

"*Allah sets forth, for an example, to the Unbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut: They were (respectively) under two of our righteous servants, but they were false to their (husbands), and they profited nothing before Allah on their account, but were told: 'Enter ye the Fire along with (others) that enter.'*" [Q 66:10. Also see 35:26]

"*Enter ye the Fire along with (others) that enter.*" This verse makes it clear that the Resurrection of the humans, animals, and Jinns has already taken place once and that Allah found the wives of Noah and Lut guilty and ordered them to enter

the Fire [of Hell] with others. Since there is no ambiguity in Allah's statement, no commentator on the Quran has, to our knowledge, spoken about it, for there is no way to deny Allah's words about the occurrence of the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment a long time before Muhammad began preaching Islam in the 7th century. Their inability to do so has also helped us conclude that the Day of Judgment has already occurred, and that the resurrected humans, animals, and Jinns have been punished.

Therefore, there is no possibility of a second Resurrection or Day of Judgment taking place, for recurrence of these events would prove that Allah's dramatic Day of Judgment had so little effect on human behavior that it required another. And if there were a second, why not a third or a fourth? Allah knew full well that He was not going to hold a second Resurrection, but through Muhammad, He kept threatening the people of Arabia with it to force them to His will. The tactic had its effect on the Pagans, Jews, and Christians of the Arabian Peninsula and they saved themselves from punishment in this world and the world hereafter by leaving their ancestral religion for Islam.

Though it is clear to us that Allah's threat to destroy the Universe is never going to materialize, we will follow Muhammad and use the future tense in discussing the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment to avoid confusion in the mind of the reader.

On the Day of Judgment, Allah will hold the entire planet in His grip. He will also roll up the heavens in His right hand, [Q 39:67] and presumably void the laws of physics to avoid a black hole that would consume planet earth. He will order an angel to sound the trumpet. At its blast, all humans, dead or

alive, on earth or in the Gardens, as well as all the animals and Jinns, and the angels who live with Allah in Paradise, will faint with terror, except as such as He will be pleased to exempt. [Q 39:68]

He will give His creations another chance to correct their erring ways before seeing them in His court by producing a Beast from the earth. He will do so because men did not believe in His Signs (revelations as well as miracles), which He had sent to them through His prophets and apostles [Q 27:82] who had come to the earth before Muhammad. Allah will produce the monster in the hope that it will succeed where the prophets had failed!

The Beast will speak to the humans, animals, and Jinns in their languages and try to persuade them to believe in all His Signs, including the Quran. Whether it will also speak to those people who passed away before the revelation of the Quran is not known, but the Quran indicates the Beast will fail. His failure will help Allah prove that He exists and that He is a revengeful man who exacts vengeance from those humans, Jinns and animal who offended Him on earth.

Allah will then ask the angel to sound the trumpet once again, [Q 39:68] and He will squeeze the earth into one of His two hands. But even after becoming a tiny object in His hand, the earth will shine with His glory, [Q 39:69] illuminating the path that will lead all men, Jinns, and animals to His throne.

The dead humans will come out with bleared eyes [Q 20:102] from their graves and Allah will make them face Him in the trial of all trials. How and from where the Jinns, animals, and the idols will be raised is not known to us.

Conscious of their lowliness, the resurrected humans will hasten in a troop to Allah's presence, with their hearts coming

right up to their throats to "choke them." [Q 40:18] Even so, the resurrected beings will utter curses at their sudden awakening from the sound sleep of death. The Quran does not mention the reaction of the animals, the Jinns and the idols.

An unidentified voice will appear from nowhere and announce: "*This is the Day of sorting out, whose truth (ye) denied.*" [Q 37:21] It will tell the cursing people: You have been awakened because that was what the *ar-Rahman* (a Deity unfamiliar to the Meccan Pagans) [Q 25:60] had promised to you when you were alive. We suspect it will be Muhammad's voice that will make the horizon quiver, and the resurrected people and the idols tremble in extreme fear. He will use Doomsday to settle his disputes with his opponents. [Q 39:31]

Allah will sit on the throne of the chief judge [Q 36:75] and the executioner, carried by eight angels, [Q 69:17] while other angels (and their number runs into trillions and zillions), taking their positions around the throne, will sing His glory and praise. [Q 39:75] He will vow to do no wrong to any of the assembled beings. Rather, He will take steps to justly repay whatever they had done on earth. [Q 40:17] All those idols whom humans worshipped on earth will face the same fate as their worshippers. Whether those earthen idols that Indian Hindus drop into rivers to dissolve away will also come back to life is not known to us.

Allah will subject all humans, Jinns, and animals and idols to trial, despite the fact that "not a single thing on earth and in the heavens had remained hidden from Him." [Q 40:16] Though He was "aware of the treachery of the eyes and even of the secrets that the breasts kept hidden," [Q 40:19] He will now demand presentation of evidence He already knows. Allah will bring all the prophets and other witnesses, as well

as Muslim Imams, [Q 17:71] forward from within the crowd to ensure that His decisions are fair to all of His creations. [Q 39:69] To further guarantee justice, Allah will seal up people's mouths and then let their hands speak to Him. Their feet will bear witness to what they had earned [Q 36:65] during their stay on earth. Their ears, eyes, and skin will also bear witness against them. [Q 41:20]

The people at trial will ask their skins why they are testifying against them, and the skins will reply:

"*Allah hath given us the speech, (He) who giveth speech to everything: He created you for the first time, and unto Him were ye to return. Ye did not seek to hide yourselves, lest your hearing, your sight, and your skins should bear witness against you! But ye did think that Allah knew not many of the things that ye used to do! But this thought of yours which ye did entertain concerning your Lord, hath brought you to destruction, and (now) have ye become of those utterly lost!*" [Q 41:21-23]

But alas! The skins' sycophancy will backfire. The guilty who lied against Allah will find the skin of their faces turned black. [Q 39:60] And once in Hell, the skins will be scalded along with the bodies of people they testified against. [Q 22:20]

But why will Allah gag people at trial?

There is only one plausible reason: Muhammad's fear of hypocrisy. He would not have worried about it if he could have seen through it reliably, and he fretted that the hypocrites might present believable cases in Allah's court, might mislead the all-seeing Allah, and might actually utter the truth. Therefore, he will shut people's mouths and ordain that their other organs develop language and memory (even of events before they had memory), sprout vocal cords, and do the talking for them. We do not know why hands, feet, and

skin would condemn themselves to Hell for eternity while tongues would not suffer any punishment!

Does it mean tongues will not burn in the fire of Hell?

In the manner stated above, one by one, each human being will meet his or her destiny on the Day of Judgment.

The Flaming Netherworld

Let us imagine new residents in Paradise, striking up conversations among themselves.

One says, "Remember that friend of yours on earth who used to scoff, 'What! Are you really one of those who believes Muhammad when he says that after we die and become dust and bones, we shall receive rewards and punishments?"

"I certainly do."

"Would you like to see where he is today?"

The listener peers far down and sees the doubter in the crackling fire of the Hell. The listener travels swiftly down to the skeptic and tells him: "By Allah! You almost ruined me! Had it not been for the grace of my Lord, I'd be with you in this stinking inferno."

And indeed those who ignored Muhammad, or in any way displeased Allah, will meet a hideous fate.

After ensuring the comfort of all pious Muslims entering the Gardens, Allah will turn to the sinners and order them to stand apart from the devout. "Did I not enjoin on you, O ye children of Adam, that ye should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an enemy avowed? And that ye should worship Me, (for that) this was the Way? But he did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did ye not, then, understand? This is the Hell of which ye were (repeatedly) warned! Embrace ye the

(Fire) this Day, for that ye (persistently) rejected (Truth)." [Q 36:60-64]

Blind, dumb, and deaf, the sinners will move forward in terror with their necks outstretched, heads uplifted, and hearts utterly vacant, staring at Allah in consternation but otherwise seeing nothing.

The zombie-ish sinners will be "brought in front of the fire [in the] morning and evening" [Q 40:46] to hear their sentencing. Each will come to Him singly to receive his or her punishment. Seeing the terrified sinners shuffling up to him, Allah will order the herder, "Bring ye up the wrong-doers and their wives, and the things they worshipped besides Allah, and lead them to the Way to the (Fierce) Fire! But stop them, for they must be asked, 'What is the matter with you that ye help not each other?" [Q 37:24 and 25] Why Allah would say "the things they worshiped besides Allah" instead of "besides Me" is hard to understand, unless Allah has the pleasing habit of referring to Himself in the third person.

The sinners and their wives will still find no helpers among themselves, and they will demand to "see those among the Jinns and men who had misled them so that they can crush them under the feet." [Q 41:29]

Instead of listening to the sinners, Allah will place the Books of their Deeds before them that contain the record of all they did on earth. Then He will ordain that they live in the fire of Hell forever.

After He has sentenced the humans and their idols, but before the herder begins dragging them towards the Hell, the sadistic Allah will command the herder to stop them so that He can ask them: "Why are you not helping each other now?"

When they will fail to answer Allah's question, the herder will deliver them to the Gatekeepers of the Hell. But before opening the portals to the underworld furnace, the Gatekeepers will taunt them: "Did not apostles come to you from among yourselves, rehearsing to you the signs of your Lord, and warning you of this day?"

After the humans and the idols have admitted their foolishness, the Gatekeepers, bowing to a stern command of Allah and to the rage of the Fire — which possesses the faculties of seeing, thinking, talking and judging — will seize them, bind them all together, and throw them into a place of tight confinement. The site of this Black Hole of Calcutta is not known. Though their punishment has scarcely begun, they will plead for annihilation there and then.

In response, the Gatekeepers will march them in yokes with chains round their necks, then drag them to Hell and fling them into its "boiling fetid fluid and fire." They will receive a garment of fire to put over their heads. With their faces turned upside down in the fire, "boiling water shall pour over their heads," [Q 40:72] even as the stinking liquid and fire perform their duties by roasting them ceaselessly. Allah will repeatedly replace their charred skins with new ones so the penalty never dulls.

When they will cry out for help, Allah shall have their lips displaced, telling them, "Were not My signs rehearsed to you, and ye did not treat them as falsehoods?" Despite having displaced lips, the sinners will be able to tell their torturer, "Our Lord! Our misfortune overwhelmed us, and we became a people astray." They will also cry aloud, "Our Lord! Bring us out! We will live a good life and will not do as we have done."

Commanding them not to talk to Him again, Allah will shower them with water as hot as molten brass, which will scald their faces. With their bodies and faces completely burned, the sinners will still succeed in asking Allah to give them a "double Penalty and curse them with a very great Curse," as they had obeyed their chiefs and great ones who misled them on earth.

Sinners will escape these punishments only after Muhammad aka Allah accepts their repentance and forgives them. [Quran, 39:53. According to this verse, all Muslims are Muhammad's servants. Hence, we assume, he has the right and power to forgive them]

The Quran does not mention whether this forgiveness will take place on earth, or in the netherworld. One thing is, however, clear: Allah aka Muhammad will never forgive those of His enemies who join gods with Him— and their number is huge— and whom He hates and, as such, they shall dwell in Hell forever.

While continuously being burned by the noxious fluid and fire, the peccant will drink boiling water, and perhaps molten brass, festering blood, and other putrid liquids. They will sip the nauseating water, but will not be able to swallow it. Harrowing punishments will assail them from every side, yet they will not die, since more penalties await them.

Floating in fetid fluids, with the flames of the Hell above and below, locked in fetters and wearing garments of liquid pitch, the condemned will hold the idols they once worshipped responsible for their plight. The idols will respond, "Nay, ye yourselves had no faith. Nor had we any authority over you. Nay, it was ye who were a people in

obstinate rebellion! So now it has been proved true against us, the Word of our Lord, that we shall indeed (have to) taste (the punishment for our sins). We led you astray: For truly we were ourselves astray."

The dwellers of Hell will have to eat the fruit of the *zaqqum* tree, which springs out of the bottom of the Hell-fire. The tops of its stalks are like the heads of devils, with which they will have to fill their bellies.

When they will feel thirsty, guardians will take them out of the Hell and give them a boiling mixture to drink. Their thirst ended, they will return to Hell's endless blaze. After recounting in detail the punishments that sinners will suffer in the next life, Allah told His earthly listeners of His compassion:

"If it had been Our Will, We could surely have blotted out their eyes; then should they have run about groping for the Path, but how could they have seen? And if it had been Our Will, We could have transformed them (to remain) in their places; then should they have been unable to move about, nor could they have been returned (after error)."

The Quran does not reveal how the listeners reacted to the above statements. Like us, they must have laughed and shook their heads!

Muhammad's Hell is certainly terrible, yet it is not as complex or frightening as Dante's in the 13th century, since the Italian poet had a better imagination. (Indeed, one wonders how Allah could have let a mere human — in fact, an Unbeliever who placed Muhammad himself in Hell — write lines more evocative and compelling than His own.) But what awaits the faithful in Paradise?

The Seven Gardens

Muhammad's vision of the Gardens of Bliss (*jannat* or *jannat un na'im* in Arabic) has proved so intoxicating that many Muslims across the centuries have laid down their lives to gain entry to them. So let us investigate this exhilarating domain.

As deserving Muslims proceed to enter the Gardens, Allah Himself will open the doors with His keys and greet them with *Salam*, a salutation from "a Lord Most Merciful." The Gatekeepers of the seven Gardens will also welcome them with: "Peace be upon you."

Passing through the gates, the lucky entrants will find themselves in a place where everything they will see will give them great delight. They will encounter companions who will derive immense pleasure from anything the new arrivals may do. Bashful virgins with dark eyes, as chaste as the breeze and as young as the men themselves, will provide them constant company.

Adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and clad in garments of silk, the male residents of the Gardens will recline on thrones in groves of cool shade. They will eat a wide variety of juicy, tasty fruits. Should they wish to dine on a special, novel treat, it will appear before them at their call. Fine beverages will abound as well. Their mere expression of desire will bring to them goblets filled with a delicious white drink from a gushing fountain. It will neither dull their senses nor befuddle them.

Inhabitants of the Gardens who will seek privacy will find their beds in lofty mansions, one above another, which Allah has already built for them in the undisclosed locations of the Gardens.

In addition to fruits and drinks, the male residents of the Gardens shall have whatever they will call for, with Allah ensuring swift fulfillment of their wishes. The Quran nowhere mentions what the wives of males in Gardens will get as a reward for their good and pious deeds on earth.

Allah fashioned the seven Gardens at the same time He was creating the Universe, which includes the seven skies. All the Gardens repose on these skies. Each one is as wide as the sky it lies on, and as wide as the earth as well. In each Garden dwell creatures like those on earth. Muhammad had seen them with his own eyes during his visit with Allah, whose Throne and Residences presumably lie in the Garden on the seventh sky.

Each Garden has many security gates, staffed by angels. Each abounds with rivers, flowing with milk and honey, and pure and crystal clear water, and delicious wine, and their taste never changes. The inhabitants of the Gardens will drink these delights from the goblets of gold.

Tall green Lote-trees without thorns and *talh* trees bear perpetual clusters of delectable fruits, add beauty to the Gardens, and shield their inhabitants from the non-existent sun's heat. Beneath them lie comfortable but throne-like benches where the Gardens' effeminate inhabitants, adorned with bracelets of gold, green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, will recline comfortably, talk among themselves, and thank Allah for the favors He bestows on them.

Equality is not one of the benefits of Paradise. Allah will allocate space in the Gardens according to the ranks He will grant to Muslims, keeping in His mind their performance on earth. The tiers are:

1) Prophets and apostles who teach and lead mankind.

2) Sincere devotees of Truth, who support the Cause with their person and with all their resources.

3) Martyrs and witnesses who suffer and serve the Cause.

4) Righteous people generally, who lead ordinary lives, but always with acceptable aims.

The higher the rank, the better the accommodation and treatment in the Gardens. For instance, residents of the higher Garden, also known as Paradise, will drink their wine from golden goblets; residents of lower down will use silver ones. Despite their division into four categories, all inhabitants of the Gardens will form one Brotherhood of Peace, one Society of Concord. Such harmony will eliminate any sense of jealousy or ill will about the unequal treatment, making their lives most peaceful and dignified.

In verse 9:72, we read: "*Allah hath promised men and women Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good Pleasure of Allah: That is the supreme felicity*."

In reality, the supreme felicity for a large percentage of Muslims lies elsewhere. To men, Allah promised pure, stunning Hurs (or houris), undefiled either by men or Jinns, to remove from their hearts the "lurking sense of injury" they might have had suffered on earth. (The Quran is silent on how the Jinns, created with fire, might have sex with the Hurs.) These females have splendid natures and will be of the same age as the men Allah will allocate them to (unless, we presume, the men die old, as most actually do). They will never grow older and their beauty will never wither. Their skin is unimaginably smooth and lustrous, and doe-like eyes adorn their faces. They are simply gorgeous.

And they are endowed with a far more remarkable quality: After each sexual encounter, they once again become virgins, thereby ensuring inexhaustible chastity for their men. Some might question the value of virginity in this system where even the most promiscuous of women would be a virgin and no one could lie with a hymen-free non-virgin even if he wanted. But Allah has ordained it and, given the torments of Hell, few will likely object.

Here is another puzzle: The Hurs are like robots. They never menstruate or give birth, and they have no desires or will of their own. Even Muhammad liked lively, passionate women such as Aisha, yet the Hurs resemble blow-up dolls. As soon as Allah transmits His guests' desire to the Hurs, they appear before their guests, lie down on the ground, and spread their legs for the men to insert their ever-erect penises into their dry vaginas.

Men do what they will need to achieve ejaculation, while the Hurs remain oblivious to their movements and grimaces. Once the men are satisfied, the Hurs arise and return to their stations, waiting for Allah's next summons for service to their clients. (Though only a limited number of Allah's guests now reside in heaven and enjoy the Hurs' attentions, these Hurs will grow much busier as they attempt to satisfy the needs of the vast multitude of Muslims who will enter the Gardens on the Day of Judgment).

Some Muslim scholars rule out carnal sex in the Gardens. They say that people widely misinterpret the word "Hur" in verse 52:20 and elsewhere. It is not feminine grammatically, they say, and therefore the Hurs are men. Their companionship will be for all in the Gardens — both men and women, who will retain their personalities but not their carnal

attributes. We can imagine the fury of newly-dead martyrs if this is true.

But is this assertion Quranically correct? Consider the following quotes, culled from the Quran:

37:49: "*And beside them [the male Muslims in Paradise] will be chaste women, restraining their glances, with big eyes (of wonder and beauty). As if they were (delicate) eggs closely guarded*."

The large-eyed women in this verse are the Hurs. A Hadith tells us: "According to Muhammad the Hurs of Paradise will be pure women — free of menstruation, urine, stool, cough and children." *[Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid, 'Ihya Ulum-Ed-Din' (in vol. 4, p. 430), translated into English by Fazl-Ul-Karim, Darul Ishaat, Urdu Bazar, Karachi, Pakistan, first ed., 1993]*

The verse above proves that these scholars' claim about the Hurs' gender is incorrect. They might, however, be right if someone proves that the translation is faulty, or if the scholars will agree that the speaker here, Allah, did not know the gender of the Hurs He created with His own hands!

44:54: "*So; and We shall join them to fair women with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes*."

"Women" here clearly refers to the Hurs, and Allah says He will join (or wed) fair, bright-eyed women with men, whom no man or Jinn touched before. [Q 55:56] Can this translation of "women" be incorrect? No, because obviously Allah cannot join male Hurs in marriage with the male denizens of the Gardens. The matter might, of course, be different if Muslim scholars agree that Allah approves of and performs same-sex marriages in the Gardens!

This passage raises a question: If carnal sex has no place in the Gardens, why should Allah bother to marry the Hurs to

the Gardens' inhabitants? Will marriage in heaven be devoid of sex? If so, why would Allah deprive its residents of this pleasure? What possible purpose could the Hurs serve?

It raises other questions as well. For instance, if the Hurs are not female, what could Allah have meant when He said that no man or Jinn touched them before? In fact, why should He take the trouble to emphasize the beauty and the sexual allure of the Hurs if their only purpose is to give company to the people Allah assigns them to?

Moreover, the repeated mentions of the Hurs' virginity and beauty clearly suggest sexual availability to any normal human reader. If they are not in fact available for sex, is Allah misleading His people? And if He is deceiving Muslims here, where else might He be deceiving them as well? Allah has also said:

"*And those who believe and whose families follow them in Faith, - to them shall we join their families: Nor shall we deprive them (of the fruit) of aught of their works: (Yet) is each individual in pledge for his deeds*." [Q 55:56]

Clearly, Allah will not permit all Muslims to enter the Gardens. Only the true believers will win admission — and once there, they will live with their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and their offspring (provided Allah finds them also true in their faith). Therefore, why would Allah provide Garden residents with Hurs for companionship when they will have their own family members for company?

There is only one answer to these questions: The Hurs exist to provide sexual gratification to males in the Gardens. They have no other function.

What about women who will enter the Gardens in their afterlife? Are there male Hurs and will Allah join them in marriage with the female residents of the Gardens?

We do not think so, despite the fact that "Hur" has a masculine form. Why not? Major reasons include: 1) The Quran is silent on the matter, and 2) the presence of male Hurs is unnecessary.

In this connection, the Quran says:

1) "*If anyone does a righteous deed, it ensures to the benefit of his own soul; if he does evil, it works against (his own soul). In the end will ye (all) be brought back to your Lord.*" [Q 45:15]

2) "*Enter ye the Garden, ye and your wives, in (beauty and) rejoicing*." [Q 43:70]

In a Hadith we read: "Abu Umama (Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'Allah will not admit anyone in the Paradise but Allah, the Mighty and glorious, will marry him with 72 wives. Two will be from virgin (haurine) with big eyes and seventy will be his inheritance from the people of the Hell-fire. Every one of them will have a pleasant vagina and he (the man) will have a sexual organ that does not bend down (during sexual intercourse)."

We draw following conclusions from the quoted materials:

1. Few women will enter the Gardens for the reason mentioned in another Hadith: ingratitude toward their husbands. Assuming Allah will admit some, they will usually have their pious, righteous husbands with them. Such women will not and cannot depend on the male Hurs to meet their sexual needs.

2. The number of males in the Gardens will clearly be larger than the number of females. Consequently, men will face a shortage of women while women will have an oversupply of men.

Hence male Hurs are unnecessary in the Gardens. On the other hand, the high male-to-female ratio makes the presence of the female Hurs logical, as Allah who is duty-bound to meet men's sexual needs, will require them.

At the same time, His sense of duty towards homosexuals in the Gardens has led Him to create and place in the Gardens youths (*gilman*, in Quranic parlance) of perpetual freshness to serve their sexual needs as "rewards for [them] and [their] endeavors." [Q 76:22]

These boys graced with eternal youth will attend them and will seem like sprinkled pearls to the beholders. The *Gilman* will wear garments of fine green silk and rich brocade, and adorned with silver bracelets. Allah will give them pure and holy wine from an ever-flowing fountain, mixed with *kapur* (camphor). [Q 76:19-21] In expression of their rising pleasure, they will exchange their wine-filled silver goblets with each other. Finding their state of mind not to His entire satisfaction, Allah will add *zanjabil*, which He will collect from a fountain called Salsabil, to their wine to make them drunk — and they will need inebriation to perform their sexual acts in the manner He desires. In their drunkenness, these boys will provide complete sexual pleasure to their pious masters, a vision that induced many homosexual Pagan men to accept Islam without regard to the mayhem they would create on this earth before their death.

Without telling us which of the seven Gardens contains this fountain of wine, Allah has made it clear that *zanjabil* drinkers

will suffer no intoxication or hangovers. But in the scenarios above, where will the female denizens of the Gardens fit in?

Whom will they turn to for sexual gratification if their husbands will refuse to oblige them? In fact, how often will men try to satisfy them, since they will have an array of stunningly beautiful Hurs on call for the purpose?

Some Muslim scholars have tried to answer our questions by telling us that Allah has placed the *Gilmans* — the pre-pubescent youths — in the Gardens to provide sexual pleasures to His female guests. Unfortunately, the Quran does not support their claim, as it indicates that these males wear silver bracelets— a mark of effeminacy— and dwell in the Gardens only to sexually serve the men.

How might Allah help women satisfy their sexual hunger? He might let them rape these *Gilmans* — and since He has created the latter, He might very well have forged them as beings whom rape does not scar or distress. Or the women might turn to each other and indulge in lesbian acts, like females in a seraglio or prison. If Allah refuses to permit women to rape the *Gilmans* or become lesbians, they may simply masturbate.

They will thus pass their days in frustration and agony — a condition aggravated by the sight of men having endless sex with Hurs before their eyes. That is what the Most Merciful has ordained for them. He neglects them on earth and He will neglect them in the Gardens as well.

The Gardens' residents will be doing nothing in their new homes. They will be free from all responsibilities they bear on earth. Here, they will not need to pray to Allah, nor worry about sin or shame. Rest and sleep are for the earthly mortals, not for Allah's guests in the Gardens!

Allah carefully controls the temperature of all the Gardens. As a result, they are neither too cold nor too hot. In fact, the vagaries of nature, which we regularly face on earth, never reach them. They are free from rain, thunderstorms, tornadoes, snow, and all other unpleasant weather.

Because of the Gardens' delightful climate, almost all the inhabitants will prefer to live in open air. Toilet and shower facilities do not, and cannot, exist in the Gardens. The grounds of the Gardens where Allah lives are holy, and to maintain their sanctity humans will neither defecate nor urinate in their next life. Allah will freeze up their wastes in their bodies.

All the residents of the Gardens will live without any tension or concern for their needs, health, or life. They will suffer no fear, disappointment, or sorrow. Everything they need will come to them at the mere expression of their will, much as we humans move our muscles by simply deciding to. Thus, if a resident wishes to eat a particular fruit, he will convey this desire to Allah through a kind of communication available only in the Gardens of Bliss. Allah will then cause a tree to spring up in front of him, if it does not exist already, bearing ripe and delicious fruit. The good resident of the Garden will not need to even move his hands to pluck the fruit; a simple eye gesture will bring it down to his gleaming plate. Whether the fruit will talk to him or put itself into his mouth is not known to us.

When the resident will wish to eat the meat of a rare fowl like an ortolan, it will land on the barbecue out of nowhere and cook itself into a delicious meat. Its uneaten portion will become a full bird and fly away, ready to instantaneously fulfill the gustatory desire of another honored guest of the Gardens!

Having nothing to do and their virility unimaginably enhanced by the food and drink they intake, the inhabitants of the Gardens will yearn for only one thing: Sex. It will occupy their minds at all times.

Indeed, Allah's concept of the hetero- and homosexual bliss in the next life prompted Abdel Hamid Kisk, a blind preacher of Egypt, to tell his audience, "Muslims who entered paradise would enjoy eternal erections and the company of young boys draped in earrings and necklaces." Some of the ulemas, the religious scholars at the al-Azhar University of Cairo, disagreed. Yes, they said, men in the Gardens will have erections, but merely protracted ones, not permanent. [Judith Miller in *God Has Ninety-nine Names*; p. 26]

Note again that the scholars have not ruled out pederasty in the Gardens. We believe men's penises will become erect immediately after each of their copulations with the boys or the Hurs.

Since men and women will live in the Gardens' open space, all of their sexual activities would take place before the eyes of most other inhabitants. Those shy about copulating in public will retire to one of the many mansions Allah has built in the Gardens, where they will indulge in wild fantasies to their hearts' content, unseen and undisturbed by their compatriots.

Men with protracted erections engaged in sex will present a scene worth watching. Most, if not all, will remain locked like dogs with the Hurs and young boys for a long time. Lying atop the Hurs (or in other positions, depending on the men's fancy) and riding the boys from behind, they will create a spectacle that no human has seen in his lifetime. It will be a worst kind of mass orgy, and one seen for eternity in the celestial Gardens.

Allah loves orgy, hence its occurrence in the Gardens, but it would not arouse His own sexual desires, as He is impotent. He will, however, visit His honored guests from time to time to make sure they are doing well in the Gardens. He will guide them when necessary to make their stay most pleasurable. He will also help them perfect their lovemaking techniques. After all, it will be His ardent desire to make His guests' stay in the Garden as pleasant as it is possible.

Since the pious Muslim men — and their number is huge — avoid excessive and entertaining sex in their ephemeral lives, the sight of most of their brethren engaging in group sex before their eyes will not appear to them as an earthly orgy. Instead, each case of intercourse would seem another pious act in the Gardens, the method, partners, and duration determined by none but Allah Himself!

So where has Muhammad been living after his death? He is a very special guest of Allah who took him up from his grave and placed him in the topmost Garden to live and enjoy His company. Here, Muhammad must be fornicating endlessly. He has little else to do, he can maintain his erections for long stretches of time (a major improvement over his capacities on earth), and he can give free rein to the lust he displayed among mortals. Another apostle who had been savoring Allah's great hospitability even before Muhammad is Jesus Christ. We do not know if he ever broke his vow of celibacy and placed his body on the appealing bosoms of the Hurs. We also do not know on which sky his Garden lies, nor in which of the seven Gardens all the martyrs of Islam and the good and the righteous people of the old have found their accommodations.

Fully convinced that Allah, if He exists, could not have arranged for — much less approved— all the lewd acts that Muslims will perform in the Gardens, we believe these statements issued straight from the mind of Muhammad, himself a licentious and perverted man. In fact, the Gardens resemble Muhammad's own household. No other prophet had conjured up a harem-like Paradise. Moreover, he repeatedly used Allah as an instrument to give authority to his twisted statements. Where he felt it necessary, he entwined Allah's existence with his own, as their joint decrees fully demonstrate. We also have a Quranic verse that demonstrates beyond any doubt that in Muhammad's mind, he was Allah, and that all humans, particularly Muslims, were and remain his servants. ["When they are summoned to Allah and His Apostle, in order that '***he***' may judge between them, behold some of them decline (to come)." Q 24:48 (*italics added*)]

Part IV: The Ghost

Muhammad's Afterlife On Earth

For some 14 centuries, while Muhammad has been copulating with the Hurs in Paradise, his ghost on earth has been causing real people endless distress. The devout have sought to literally follow utterances often meant for the moment, and have committed countless follies to win the favor of his representatives and join Muhammad in the Gardens. As a result, millions of innocent people have suffered. The number of people who have lost their lives to his followers is unknown to us.

Most immediately, however, Muhammad's death ended a long tyranny. It freed his wives from his bondage and gave a sigh of relief to the Pagans whom he had forced to abandon their ancestral faith. His death also removed the shadow of his omnipresent sword from the heads of Jews.

On the other hand, he left behind his religious doctrines. Some of them have crippled the lives of many of his followers while others have led them to schism and hatred of people with different philosophies of life. *Allahu Akbar*, essentially a Muslim war cry, still turns many Muslims into ferocious animals in their battles, interfaith riots, and sectarian conflicts. Allegations of past angelic support for Muslims warring against infidels drive small, weak Islamic states to challenge the combined might of the world's industrialized nations. Muhammad's murder of Jews and his hateful teachings against them [Q 5:54] still generate fiery desire in most Muslims to wipe Jews from the face of the earth.

His call to kill Pagans whenever and wherever they are found [Q 9:5] is a constant source of inspiration for many of his followers to murder the Hindus. As Bernard Lewis has pointed out in *The Crisis of Islam*, many Muslims believe Muhammad's belligerent teachings impose a duty on them to destroy the entire world to realize their apocalyptic design of restoring the Islamic Caliphate.

Muslims believe that his many claims — such as that Jews and Christians corrupted their religious books, that every word of his statements in the Quran came directly from Allah (and remains pristine), that he journeyed to heaven and parleyed with Allah — all make him the holiest among the holy men, and make his words the holiest among all holy words in other scriptures. Questioning these beliefs makes non-believers as well as the freethinking Muslims highly vulnerable to the wrath of his bloodthirsty followers.

As the result of Islamic extremism, a camouflaged distrust has been brewing between Muslims and non-Muslims of the world. Many non-Muslims do not feel comfortable interacting with Muslims. Many non-believers feel afraid of them. Many non-Muslims want them destroyed. The rift in mankind caused by the hostile teachings of Islam has already caused great harm. It continues to hurt Muslims more than any other religious group. In desperation, many Muslims have turned to terrorism in the belief that destruction of the non-believers' civilizations would lead to an Islamic hegemony in the world and free them from their economic hardships. The Quran — a manual of terrorism — plays a major role in creating mass murderers like Osama bin Laden.

To save our world and our posterity from the holocaust of World War III, we say: *Remove Muhammad's teachings from the*

Islamic seminaries, mosques, and schools. Cleanse the minds of Muslims already infested by them. Bring them to the fold of civility, fill them with the teachings of love and respect, plant the hope for a better future in their minds. And integrate them into our societies, so they too can live better lives and strive to ensure the same for their next generation. We say so in the belief that in this prescription lies the betterment of the world, today and tomorrow.

Quandary at the Helm

Muhammad's death left his followers with a major question: Who will succeed him? It's a challenging question about a prophet, since a literal successor would also have the gift of prophecy and a direct line to Allah. Yet such powers would seriously diminish the singularity and prestige of Muhammad himself. A second prophet would almost certainly revise Muhammad's teachings. He would also likely exalt his own authority over Muhammad's, exactly as Muhammad had over Jesus and Moses. That is why he had Allah declare him the last prophet to visit earth. In essence, Muhammad didn't want anyone pulling the trick on him that he had pulled on Jesus, Abraham, and the rest. No prophets were to come after him, though the Quran leaves open the possibility of apostles coming to earth to take care of its problems.

Though there could be no follow-up prophet, Muslims did in fact need a successor, and the reason is clear. Muhammad was not just a prophet, but a dictator. He ran a powerful political organization and his demise left it headless. But how would they choose a new political leader? Inheritance was problematic. As noted earlier, all his male children died in infancy. He had a surviving daughter, but as he and most Muslims considered females inferior to males, she had no

chance to reign over the Muslim empire after his death. *[Cf. Q 2:228, 2:282, 4:34, 37:153, et al]*

Designation had simply failed. Muhammad obviously could have nominated a successor, but he never did, most likely because he was unwilling to share even a wisp of authority even after his death! The all-knowing Allah clearly understood the troubles ahead as a result, but deemed them secondary to Muhammad's enjoyment of power.

The people of Medina therefore decided to elect one of their own to succeed him. To the city elders over in Mecca, this task was fraught with danger. They seemed ready to reject any purely Medinese choice, precipitating civil war. To avoid it, the elder Medinese asked the Meccan Quraish to send a delegation so that they could jointly select a Caliph who would exercise all the temporal powers Muhammad had enjoyed in his lifetime.

The Medinese and Meccans spent a few days maneuvering among themselves. One obvious choice was Ali, the 33-year-old cousin of Muhammad and husband of his daughter Fatima. Ali had both the pedigree and the capacity. He was not only the second or third person to convert to Islam, but he had proven himself a shrewd general and a clever negotiator. He possessed something of Muhammad's personal magnetism. Moreover, some believed that Muhammad had actually designated Ali as his successor, though reliable modern evidence is scant.

But Ali was too Medinese for the Quraish. Though Muhammad had defeated the Quraish in battle, they knew other ways to exercise power. They opposed Ali on the ostensible grounds of his youth, though 33 was hardly young

at a time when life expectancy was short. Alexander the Great died a month shy of 33, for instance.

Eventually, they compromised on Abu Bakr as the first Caliph of the Muslim Umma. He was then old, and one reason for the compromise may have been that few expected him to live long.

In the opposition of these two towns lie the roots of the terrible Sunni-Shia schism that would later afflict Islam. The course is not direct and the strands twist through history, but in rough terms the Meccan Quraish, the skilled administrators and politicians (whom Allah called "evil-doers" after the Battle of Uhud -Q 3:128), would become the majority Sunni, and the Medinese, the more fervent believers who favored Ali, would become the Shia.

Abu Bakr was the first of the four *rashidun* successors — the "rightly guided" ones who had known Muhammad personally. He was also the only one to die of natural causes, again perhaps because few in the violent circle around him expected the canny warrior to live long. He called himself the *Khalifat Rasul Allah*, or "successor to the messenger of Allah," from which "Caliph" derives.

He also began collecting all the scraps on which Muhammad's scribe Zayd ibn Thabit had written the Prophet's words, and which Muslims today believe constitute the Quran.

One interesting question is how much the scribe may have improved upon Muhammad's utterances. Most people credit the Quran entirely to Muhammad and dismiss Ibn Thabit as a mere copier, but as a literate man the scribe may well have been responsible for the style and tone of the Quran. That is, Muhammad may have had a lifelong "as-told-to" coauthor.

Why did Abu Bakr begin collecting these jottings? He obviously knew how often Muhammad received revelations that conveniently solved problems in his life. He may even have known that Muhammad would not have wanted posterity to see some of his messages. The future was never the audience, or even his concern, as shown by his failure to name a successor. Moreover, the task was fraught with problems. The scribe had written on leaves, stones, and bone— anything at hand — and they lay all over the place. Many had degraded. Some were eaten up by a goat in the bedroom of Aisha. Abu Bakr must have known that assembling them would take years, as in fact it did. So why the effort?

One reason no doubt lay in Muhammad's references to the perfect Quran in the sky, and his successors apparently saw no blasphemy in trying to reproduce it on earth with their imperfect abilities!

Another, more important reason was to provide laws for Muslims to live by. Muhammad had issued numerous edicts regulating behavior and the state he left behind revolved around them, so his successors felt it important to preserve them. But a third, just as important, was competitive necessity. Muhammad's trick was not hard and others realized they could duplicate it and rise to power. Hence, in the Yemen the charismatic al-Aswad was promoting a god named *ar-Rahman* ("merciful") and predicting a wondrous age of justice. In Yamama in northeastern Arabia, Maslama was writing a Quran of his own, foretelling an apocalypse and a revolutionary new era. One Khalid ibn Sinan, more of a blank to history, was also preaching in the name of a single God. Abu Bakr likely understood that if he could get as many of

Muhammad's words memorialized forever on paper, he would gain an immense advantage over these upstarts.

The message would circulate much more easily. It would become standardized, so all would understand it and hew to it, and others would have trouble altering it. It would gain status. The Quran was a military vehicle of the intellect, helping Islam overwhelm other pretenders who lacked the time and resources to develop a similar book.

However, no sooner did Abu Bakr become Caliph than he faced a great challenge. Muhammad had forced many tribes into subjugation, and now they flung off the irons of Islam and refused to pay the *jizya*. As a result, Caliph Abu Bakr spent the first 12 months of his rule in bitter battles, far bloodier than any fought by Muhammad. He also formalized the hierarchy, and in doing so, helped satisfy the Quraish by giving them prominent positions in the military, with plenty of opportunity for plunder. However, observers were correct about Abu Bakr's longevity. He died in 634, just two years after succeeding Muhammad.

From Caravan Raiders to Emperors

History books tend to marvel at Muslims' swift conquest of much of the world after Muhammad's death. Its velocity was indeed remarkable, but Muslims were also extremely lucky. They began their expansion under just the right circumstances, at just the right time, in just the right places.

And if Muhammad had never been a caravan thief, Islam would not have conquered much of the known world.

The second ruler was the impulsive egotist **Omar ibn al-Khattab** (r. 634-644), one of Muhammad's many fathers-in-law, and he played a crucial role in consolidating the empire.

For instance, he decreed that the Islamic calendar would begin in 622, the year Muhammad arrived in Medina. Why then and not his birthday, say, or his first revelation from Allah? According to one legend, Omar said it was at the moment of the Hijra "that there was truly a break between *al-batil* [error] and *al-haq* [truth]." [Quoted in Fatema Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy*, New York, Basic Books, 1992, p. 136]

If this assertion is correct, the Meccan portions of the Quran are error. But if they are error, we must ask: Who was visiting Muhammad and giving him revelations during this time? Were there two Allahs? Had Satan been more active than the scholars imagined? The legend may or may not be true. Regardless, the decision to begin the Muslim calendar in 622 has ever after highlighted the perceived importance of several aspects of Muhammad's career: The Medinese Suras over the Meccan, the Prophet's earthly glory over his inconspicuousness, his wealth over his poverty, his power over his impotence, his military might over his mere personal persuasive power. It constituted a rejection of the most decent part of the Quran and an exaltation of the worst. One can of course understand why a dictator like Omar would favor the parts of a holy book written by a man after he had become a dictator.

Like Abu Bakr, Omar oversaw the collection of bits of writing to form the Quran itself, and he gave it its peculiar order, from longest to shortest Suras. Since the longest tend to be Medinese, this structure stressed the barbaric over the pacific. In "The Cow," the long second Sura, the Quran also set forth a large portion of the rules Muslims were to follow, saving lazy readers from rummaging through the rest. The Sura "Cows'" Medinese origin would imply that Muslims

were not required by Allah to perform their hajj during the time they lived in Mecca for 13 years, as the idols were occupying the Kaba. If our hypothesis is correct, then we must ask: Why Muhammad traveled from Medina to perform his umra when the idols were still living in it?

Some say the collection of Hadith also began under Omar's reign. Scholars do not agree and they maintain it began over 230 years after the Prophet's demise. *[Cf. Karen Armstrong; op. cit. p. 160]* Omar ordained the Five Pillars of Islam. Economically, Omar faced a knotty problem. Muslims had long earned their livelihood by raiding other tribes, but by then all the tribes of Arabia had become Muslim, part of the Umma. Members of the Umma could not attack one another, at least in theory. So how could Muslims make a living?

The answer lay in raiding non-Muslims, and Omar led his armies out into foreign lands where they began the fantastic series of conquests that would give them in a short time an empire and a wondrous life.

The first major triumph occurred below the Golan Heights. There, in 636, Omar's generals trapped and massacred 30,000 troops of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius in the Battle of Jabiya-Yarmuk, and took northern Palestine.

Then with massive aid from Jews, Muslims conquered Jerusalem, after a siege of six or seven months in 638. Heraclius, a religious bigot, had imposed savage laws on Jews, and since they had not apparently read the Quran and learned of Muhammad's detestation of them, many Jews acted as guides and even warriors for the Muslim army.

By the early 640s Syria, Libya, and Egypt had also fallen. The dazzle of Alexandria at first rendered Muslim messengers back to Mecca speechless for fear of disbelief. Marble and

granite were everywhere, and the nocturnal city was aglow with light. The great Pharos, or lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, still stood perhaps 400 feet high. According to the report, eventually submitted, the great metropolis had 4,000 palaces, 4,000 baths, and 400 theaters. With these conquests, the Byzantine Empire shrank to a fifth of its previous size and Heraclius reportedly lived out his final years in apathy.

In 637, Muslims faced the other great regional power, the Sassanians of Iraq and Iran, whose leader Yazdegird III took the throne after a string of royal assassinations had weakened the spine of the empire. He sent 30,000 men to face the 6-12,000 Muslims, and the armies clashed at Qadisiyyah, on the west bank of the Euphrates near modern Baghdad. The Sassanians used fighting elephants, which frightened Muslims and caused them to break and run. But by chance they received as reinforcements men with experience in battling the great pachyderms. They returned, forced the Sassanian army back toward the escape-blocking river, and butchered its soldiers. The Euphrates ran red.

Muslim conquerors entered Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanian Empire, as the royalty fled. The city amazed them. It had seven astonishing palace complexes, topped by the fabled White Palace, the residence of the emperor. The soldiers' share of the loot here — women, gems, gold, and silver — exceeded the total of all the plunder they had ever taken. The Muslim general, wary of letting his men sink into this fabulous down, restricted them to a garrison outside the town, from which they ran the city. This approach set the pattern for future conquests.

The Sassanians were major players on the world stage at the time, and this victory was a remarkable feat, one that the Byzantine Empire centered in Constantinople had tried and failed to achieve for decades.

It gave Muslims about half the Sassanian Empire They then proceeded to conquer all of Iran, and enter Armenia, Afghanistan, Khurasan in Central Asia, and the region around the Aral Sea. Though Muslims spread Islam through Iran, an undercurrent of resistance remained. Iran had enjoyed a distinctive civilization for 1100 years, and its people retained a sense of superior culture. It would surface later and we see its impact almost every day today on the international stage.

The wars of conquest spread even further. In Africa, the Muslim armies quickly crossed sparsely populated northern Africa and reached the Berbers of modern Morocco, fighters who put up surprising resistance. Later, they entered and conquered Spain.

Charles Martel and his adjutants finally stopped them in France, though the situation there seesawed for decades. To the east, Muslims reached as far as the Tang Empire in central Asia. While the Arab armies were relatively small, after these conquests many Arabs did move north from the Peninsula, lured by the wonders of civilization.

What explains the Muslims success in these wars? In the 19th century, scholars imagined vast hordes of people erupting from Arabia, as far as the eye could see, sweeping all before them. But as we've seen, the Muslim armies were relatively small. The explanation lies elsewhere.

It wasn't their desire to spread the faith. As they had learned in Arabia, if they converted everyone to Islam, they would have no one left to plunder! One essential was

Muhammad's criminal history of caravan raiding. Because of Muhammad's early poverty, he later developed insatiable greed, and he began raiding caravans for plunder. It was also necessary for his survival and for the support of his hungry acolytes. These exercises in force were semi-military. Of course, a caravan attack is much more one-sided than a battle, but for that reason it needs a sensible training field in the art of war. Moreover, caravans were lifelines for the desert communities and control of them meant political power. Muhammad's thieving had far wider implications than, say, the breaking and entering of a cat burglar. It invited the formation of armies. In addition, these raids gave his men training in offense and encouraged an ethic of battlefield bravery. And, critically, they led to organization. Organization is the difference between an army and a horde.

In his boundless greed, Muhammad was alert to all these factors. Soon he cast his eye on nearby towns and attacked and overwhelmed them as well.

As we've seen, Muhammad also used special techniques to give his warriors heart when they began fighting real battles. Imaginary, invisible, powerful reinforcements were all about, he informed them. Fleets of angels soared into battle above them. Allah accompanied them too. Thus, even when the foe outnumbered them, they had a psychological advantage most of their adversaries lacked. They had greater confidence and less fear of death.

Most normal people have one paramount goal in battle: Staying alive. That's why armies with little motivation, like Saddam Hussein's troops in the Gulf War, will flee at the first opportunity. To overcome this problem, the U.S. armed forces uses powerful negative reinforcement. It requires basic

training, a program with one overarching objective: To break soldiers' will and habituate them to obey any order instantly, no matter how dangerous or absurd. In the past, armies have relied on other caution-killers, such as alcohol. Drunk soldiers lose their judgment and are more likely to plunge into hazardous combat.

Muhammad focused more on positive reinforcement. Death for Allah was glorious. And it led at once to the Gardens, where the gorgeous, pliant Hurs awaited with their arms outstretched. It is impossible to know how many Muslim soldiers died for this vision, but we know it has been effective because we can see it at work today. It helps enable suicide bombings. (Suicide bombers also enjoy further positive reinforcement: A post-mortem reputation for heroism, and honor and often financial assistance for their families.) But it rests on the vision of the Gardens.

For instance, here is one of the many belligerent statements Allah made to force the Pagans and non-believers into Islam and into the servitude of Muhammad: "*Can you expect for us (any fate) other than one of two glorious things - (martyrdom or victory)? But we can expect for you either that Allah will send His punishment from Himself or by our hands. So wait (expectant); we too will wait with you.*" [Q 9:52]

This verse also defined the ultimate goals that all Muslims must have in their minds before going to war with their enemies: Triumph or death, or, rather, "martyrdom."

Allah also informed them that if a Muslim succeeds in battle, he becomes "*Gazi*" (hero or conqueror), an exalted title he wins from grateful compatriots. The warriors' success enables them to share the spoils of the war, including the male

and female prisoners, whom Allah helps *Gazis* capture from their enemy.

In contrast, most other armies Muslims fought were less motivated and cared much more about enjoying a normal lifespan. They would thus turn and run faster. They were fighting for monarchies in which they had little vested interest.

Moreover, under the first two Caliphs, the Muslim armies had become more disciplined and more strategic. They were much more effective fighting forces, commanded often by able men, with better arms and a top-down command structure that worked to their great advantage.

Finally, the Islamic armies enjoyed fabulous geopolitical luck. They came trotting into a power void. The Byzantine and Iranian kingdoms, centered in Constantinople and Ctesiphon, had been fighting a merciless, exhausting war for a quarter century, while Muhammad was preaching in the desert and building his dictatorship. These two great powers scarcely acknowledged his little state. As we've seen, Muhammad had earlier taken his force to the brink of the Byzantine Empire, only to retreat when he realized that Allah was helpless here and he would suffer an overwhelming defeat.

But the intervening years had been exceptionally kind to aspiring conquerors, like Muslims. For instance, the warring kingdoms had effectively destroyed two buffer states, the Ghassanid and Lakhmid kingdoms, and thus exposed their own borders to the ferocious Muslim attack.

The Muslim armies arrived when these two powers were weak after decades of fighting, yet unable to cooperate to ward off the threat. Muslims were able to drive a wedge between the two and seized much of their territory in the

Middle East. It was a fluke. If Muhammad had been born 25 years earlier, the great conquest would have died before it started and Islam would almost certainly have remained in Arabia — if it survived at all.

The Abyss Opens

Omar died in 644, knifed to death by a Persian slave, apparently for personal reasons. Though he had become the ruler of a vast empire, the conquests had happened somewhat to his surprise, for he had a cautious nature and generally sought to consolidate rather than fly into battle and expand. He worried about controlling his generals, as well as the subject states and the suddenly expanded organization he ran — an early version of the hyper-growth that would afflict Silicon Valley companies in the 20th century.

At the same time, however, he sought to extract as much loot from the conquered people as possible— even though more booty was flowing in than he could comprehend. When Amr, the general who had conquered Egypt, objected to the severity of Omar's taxation, the commander-in-chief recalled him and replaced him with a more prehensile administrator.

After Omar's death, the Companions of Muhammad again rejected Ali, and chose as Caliph Othman ibn Affan (r. 644-656). Othman was the wealthy Quraish who had converted to Islam early and aided Muhammad with his bequests of money. Since he had married one of Muhammad's daughters and then, after she died, another one, people called him "the possessor of two lights."

Under Othman, some scholars say, the Quran reached its final, if defective, form in 650 A.D. Others, who have studied its verses and dated their origin, believe it took its present shape in 933 A.D. In any case, his collection of the words of

Allah contributed to his violent death. Many Muslims, especially in Egypt, objected to omission of material they felt belonged there. The whole enterprise gave his enemies plenty of ammunition to charge him with faults. Othman was extremely nepotistic, for instance, replacing scores of top officials with men from his own clan, the Ummaya, one of the elite Quraish clans.

As a result, these individuals grew extremely wealthy, and other Quraish clans became very jealous of them. Othman owned a thousand horses and a thousand slaves and lived in extravagant luxury. Many Muslims felt he was subverting Muhammad's message. As a result, a garrison rode from Egypt to Medina and attacked Othman, striking him with swords and fists until he lay in a pool of blood on the floor. The main assassin was likely Muhammad, the son of Abu Bakr and the brother of Aisha. No one punished him. As a result, Ali ibn Abi Talib finally became Caliph in 656. He was now 55. Those electing him believed he embodied the old virtues of doctrinal solidity and equality, a relief from the excesses of Othman.

He ruled for five years (656-661) and oversaw a time of troubles. First, Aisha deeply resented him. Ali had been "the first male Muslim," but Aisha felt that she, as Muhammad's favorite wife and intimate, knew the Prophet better and deserved priority. She condescended to instruct Ali in the wishes and meanings of the Prophet. But that was not enough.

In the winter of 656, Aisha went riding on camelback to help lead soldiers against Ali in the first civil war, or *fitna*. It was the first major rift in the vast Muslim state. Ali defeated her and her allies in southern Iraq at the Battle of the Camel. He had the two leading male rebels killed and placed Aisha

under house arrest. One upshot of Aisha's arrogant revolt and embarrassing surrender was to weaken the position of women in society. [David Levering-Lewis, *God's Crucible*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2008, p. 89] Another was to create a precedent for civil strife within the society. Ultimately, this brief war was the first blood in the Sunni-Shiite divide.

Othman's relatives did not fare well under Ali. He eliminated three of them from key emirates in the empire. But the wiliest was Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sofian, the emir of Damascus and the cousin of Othman. He refused to step down, and placed the blood-soaked shirt of Othman on show in the Damascus mosque, demanding revenge against his assassins. Mu'awiya was the son of Muhammad's enemies for a long time: Abu Sofian ibn Harb who had defeated Muhammad at Uhud, and his sharp-tongued wife, Hind bint Utba. He was also a skillful general, the first to extend the Muslim power to the seas. He had seized Cyprus from Byzantium in 649 and in 650 destroyed a Byzantine fleet of 3,000 ships, ending its chance to retake Alexandria.

Ali stoked the tensions by appointing Othman's assassin, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, as emir ("commander") in Egypt. In a sense, this was a class conflict. Ali's supporters were the Bedouins and the poor of Arabia, the people who had first rallied to Muhammad in Mecca and followed him to Medina.

Ali realized that Medina was ill-placed to rule this empire from and resist assault, so in the spring of 657, he shifted his capital to al-Kufa, a garrison town on the banks of the Euphrates. In that year the Battle of Siffin took place against Muawiya's forces on the Mesopotamian plains, and Ali routed them. He could have eliminated this challenge to his reign

right there, but instead he entered into talks with Mu'awiya that dragged on for over three months without result.

Another battle ensued, and when Ali was on the brink of winning it, Muawiya's soldiers stuck Qurans on the tips of their bayonets and marched into the battle. Both armies seemed perplexed by the question of how to proceed — harming copies of the Quran seemed a greater sin than killing human beings — and Ali agreed to another truce.

Negotiations continued without result and Ali's waffling undermined support for him among the Bedouins and his troops in general. Finally, Ali fell victim to a simple trick.

Muawiya's representatives suggested that both sides withdraw their claims in favor of an impartial individual. Ali agreed and announced his withdrawal. Mu'awiya then had his men praise Ali for abdicating and declare that Mu'awiya would assume command.

A fundamentalist stabbed Ali to death on the steps of the al-Kufa mosque. The murderer belonged to a group called Kharajites who believed that piety alone should determine who led the Muslim community, not family ties or political prestige.

Ironically, he killed the wrong man, for Ali was clearly more pious than Mu'awiya, but fundamentalist assassins have always been careless about their targets, thinking the innocent make the point as well as the guilty. We don't know if the killer of Muhammad's son-in-law has joined the Prophet Muhammad for eternal bliss up in the Gardens, but no doubt he was sure he would.

Ali was the last of the *rashidun*, and his assassination set off a series of civil wars. Following his assassination and the

murder of his son Husayn at Karbala, Islam split into two major sects: ***Sunni*** and ***Shia.***

Today, Shiites are perhaps 10-15% of all Muslims, but they predominate in Iran, southern Iraq, and southern Lebanon, though patches also exist in other places. Sunnis dominate everywhere else, from Morocco to Indonesia.

At risk of oversimplifying, the split resembles that which exists between Catholics and Protestants if we suppose the Catholics were a persecuted underclass for centuries. Like the Protestants, Sunnis are fragmented and tend to emphasize the monotheistic elements of Christianity. Like the Catholics, Shiites are better organized and celebrate figures analogous to saints, like Husayn and Ali.

Ultimately, however, these differences are more flashpoints than causes for schism. The roots lie more in the early power struggle and the human tendency to bead into opposing groups. And over time, as the Shiites felt themselves more and more victimized, the gulf of distrust grew. Though Sunnis and Shiites have lived together for centuries in uneasy peace, Shiites have also endured oppression from regimes like the Ottoman Empire and Saddam Hussein of Iraq. At times, fighting broken out, as during the American occupation of Iraq, where their battles bloodied streets.

Allah could have prevented this long, painful conflict just by giving Muhammad a revelation about the succession. Why didn't He? He issued revelations on far less important matters. But as we have noted, this question answers itself if Allah was simply Muhammad. He didn't want to share power on earth and he didn't care what happened after he died.

And as it happens, the Sunni-Shia rift was just the beginning. Today, there are some 73 sects in Islam, total.

Though Allah took all steps to save the Quran from corruption, [Q 15:9] He strangely failed to prevent Islam from fissuring into this panoply. And though all the sects disagree, Allah will send no new prophet to clear up their differences. As a result, they often try to solve their theological disputes with bloodshed and create mayhem for themselves and others.

Indeed, Allah has never been able to control the minds of the humans, despite His claims of omnipotence. That's why He offers so many incentives to people in the Quran, so many threats and enticements. Consequently, humans have always exploited His weaknesses and done things that suit their fancies, and this fact can only mean that they think little of His vast supposed powers. They, and more specifically Muslims, may pretend to follow the Quran where necessary to avoid reprisals from other Muslims, but ultimately it hasn't convinced them.

Islam and Half of Humanity

One day in 2004, a Saudi woman named Rania al-Baz answered a ringing telephone. For uncertain reasons this act enraged her husband who savagely attacked her, breaking her nose and fracturing her face in 13 places. His choice of a victim was poor for, even though she was his wife, Ms. al-Baz had not spent her life at the back of the house. She was a warm, well-liked personality on a morning family TV show and her case won airing in the Saudi media, perhaps the first time a wife-beating ever had.

Though her husband was the culprit, Ms. al-Baz may owe her damaged face ultimately to Muhammad, for in the Quran he recommends women-beating: "*(As to) those {women} on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them, and refuse to share their beds and beat them.*" [Quran, 4:34]

Women make up half or more of all Muslims, and the policies of Islam toward them have long been self-mutilating for Islam itself. Domestic violence is just one of the ways the Quran has created two-level societies in Islam, with the men on the higher tier and the women on the lower.

In Saudi Arabia, the obedience slope is especially steep. Women cannot vote, drive, own a business, or travel without the consent of a male guardian, typically the husband. Among the tribal Pathans in Afghanistan, Robert Kaplan reported in 1990, it is even worse. Women didn't even seem to exist. He cites three Pathan proverbs:

Women have no noses. They will eat shit

One's own mother and sister are disgusting.

Women belong in the house or in the grave.

[Robert D. Kaplan, *Soldiers of God*, New York, Vintage, 2001, 49]

Indeed, the apartheid was so strict that Pathans wouldn't even reveal the names of their wives and mothers, and one Pathan lawyer told him: *"Women are as private to a Pathan as his private parts."* [*Ibid*, 50] He was, perhaps, inspired by the Quranic verses that suggest that all women, including his wife, daughter, mother and sister, are his property. [Q 2:223 *et al*]

If Khadija had followed the life of a devout Muslim woman in such societies, Islam would have died in its crib.

But it is not just Saudi Arabia and rural Afghanistan. UCLA political scientist Michael Ross wrote, "In the Middle East, fewer women work outside the house, and fewer hold positions in government, than in any other region of the world." [Michael Ross, "Oil, Islam, and Women," *American Political Science Review*, Feb. 2008]

The Quran deems a woman's testimony in court worth half that of a man's. [Q 2:282] It lets Muslim men marry up to four wives ("*Marry women of your choice, two or three or four.*" [Q 4:3]). It holds that sons should inherit twice as much as daughters. [Q4:11]

Overall, it details a two-tier system that hamstrings Muslims today. Ross details some of the results: "The failure of women to join the non-agricultural labor force has profound social consequences: It leads to higher fertility rates, less education for girls, and less female influence within the family. It also has far-reaching political consequences: When fewer women work outside the home, they are less likely to exchange information and overcome collective action problems; less likely to mobilize politically and to lobby for expanded rights; and less likely to gain representation in government."

Moreover, in today's globalized world, they are less apt to contribute their talents to the economy. Today's Khadijas might help lead major corporations and develop break-throughs in business, science, and industry, but Islam strongly discourages them and we see their presence rarely. As a result, Muslim nations in essence chop off a leg and go hobbling about the world on crutches.

Domestic violence: In Egypt, according to Amnesty International, of all the women killed each year, 35% die as a result of domestic violence.1 And Egypt is one of the less restrictive Muslim countries.

"It is considered a husband's right that his wife should obey him," says Abeer Mishkhas, of the Saudi English-language paper *Arab News*. "This can involve coercion or violence, and we know that the majority of cases of this kind

go unreported and unnoticed." [Nadia Abou el Magd, "Domestic Violence Fatwa Stirs Outrage," *The National*, Oct. 28, 2008]

Recently, a wave of fatwas has recognized the right of the wife to fight back — and, while humane, they also highlight the problem with the Quran. In 2007, Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, a well-known Shiite scholar from Lebanon, issued a fatwa supporting the woman's right to defend herself against violence. It also stated that Islam forbids men from committing any kind of violence against women. Since verse 4:34 explicitly endorses violence against women, this fatwa places Fadlallah in the position of a Christian believer in evolution: Either scripture is correct or the modern world is. He is morally right here, but at odds with Muhammad's command to his followers. He is, essentially, telling Muslims to ignore the Quran!

Similarly in late 2008, Sheikh Abdel Hamid al-Atrash, who heads the fatwa committee at Cairo's Al Azhar University, the Harvard of Sunni Islam, ruled that "a wife has the legitimate right to hit her husband in order to defend herself. Everyone has the right to defend themselves, whether they are a man or a woman … because all human beings are equal before God." But again verse 4:34 says, "The good women are therefore obedient," so if we take the Quran and this fatwa together literally, women are equal to men, but they must obey men. We see the same kind of equality in *Animal Farm*.

Why is this problem peculiar to Islam, of all the world's main religions? We have no doubt about the answer. It lies in the life of the Prophet. As we have noted earlier, the founder of no other religion kept a harem. And Muhammad had problems satisfying the women in his seraglio, so he may have

either beaten them himself or sympathized with men who wished to. He is said to have beaten Aisha for a trifling matter. [Sahih Muslim; Vol. 2, Book 4, Hadith No. 2127] The Quran allows women-beating because of one man's marital difficulties.

Rape: As we've seen, when others charged Muhammad's favorite wife with sexual indiscretion, Allah spoke to him. The verdict? Muhammad was not a cuckold, Allah said, adding that Muslims needed four male witnesses to prove such an offense. The Quran waved away the testimony of the female victim as if it were intrinsically unreliable, and this expedient became hardened in Islamic law.

How many men have committed rape because of this edict, knowing that the law wouldn't punish them? We cannot know. But it has clearly placed Muslim women in much greater danger than women elsewhere on earth. It has also made dictates that they stay in the house seem more reasonable, since they are safer there. It has even undermined the power of the law itself, for where the law fails, honor codes arise and people take vengeance into their own hands. Ironically, the husbands of countless raped women have suffered "dishonor" to preserve the honor of one man of the 7th century.

Sexual indiscretion: For sexual indiscretion, Allah has prescribed different punishments for men and women. According to the Quran, if two women are accused of lewdness and four men testify to it, the women must be confined to houses "until death do claim them, or Allah ordain for them some (other) way." [Quran; 4:15] The penalty is thus life imprisonment.

Muslim scholars want us to believe that Allah requires four male witnesses to protect women from false accusations. But the question is: If a man wants to dispose off a woman he does not like or has a problem with, is it difficult for him to find or buy three more men to testify against her?

If two men commit sexual indiscretion, they receive an unspecified punishment, which might simply be a slap on the wrist. And if they repent and promise not to do it again, they go free, since Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. [Q 4:16] Thus, for the same offense, Allah jails women forever, but releases men at once to enjoy the pleasures of the world!

Child brides and pedophilia: In August, 2008, the Saudi press reported that a 70-yearold man had married a child of 10. [*Okaz*, August 11, 2008] In the same month, a Saudi court rejected a plea to annul the marriage of an eight-year-old girl whose father had betrothed her to a 58-yearold man to gain a dowry of about $8,000. [*Al-Hayat*, August 13, 2009]

Child marriage lives on. The Quran allows it, saying:

65:4: "*(Such of your women) as have passed the age of monthly courses, for them the prescribed period, if ye have any doubts, is three months, and for those who have no courses (it is the same)….*"

Those who have no courses are non-menstruating young girls.

Here is Maududi's comment on this verse: "They may not have menstruated as yet either because of young age, or delayed menstrual discharge as it happens in the case of some women, or because of no discharge at all throughout life…

"Here, one should bear in mind the fact that according to the explanations given in the Quran the question of the waiting period arises in respect of the women with whom

marriage may have been consummated, for there is no waiting-period in case divorce is pronounced before the consummation of marriage. (*Al-Ahzab*: 49). Therefore, making mention of the waiting-period for the girls who have not yet menstruated clearly proves that it is not only permissible to give away the girl in marriage at this age but it is also permissible for the husband to consummate marriage with her. Now, obviously no Muslim has the right to forbid a thing which the Qur'an has held as permissible." [Maududi's comment on verse 65:4 in *Tafhimul Quran*, vol. 5, pp. 570-71]

Indeed. And clerics further defend the practice by pointing to the paramount example of behavior in the Muslim world, Muhammad himself, a child molester who, as we've seen, married Aisha at six and slept with her at nine. As far as we know, this act separates Muhammad from all other founders of religions.

Muhammad's relationship with Aisha continues to harm young girls in the Islamic world today. For instance, the aged Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran married a girl of 10, and he called such marriages *"a divine blessing"*. For many years the Islamic Republic of Iran legalized marriages by nine-year-old girls in its Civil Code ("Marriage before puberty [that is, nine years] is prohibited".), though it has now responded to citizens' anger and raised the age to 13. Saudi Arabia long tolerated marriages to girls at nine, and like Pakistan, it recently flouted the Quran and raised the age past puberty.

In the eyes of Allah, defiance of the Quran is a cardinal sin and all those who commit it will endure the charred skins, scalding beverages, and hideous viands of Hell. So the rulers of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan — and indeed every Muslim nation on earth — should thoroughly prepare to answer

Allah's stern questions on the Day of Judgment about why they stopped grown men from marrying children!

What if Muhammad came back to life today in Iran or Saudi Arabia and married another Aisha? The authorities would face a dilemma. Marriage to six-year-old girls now contravenes Islamic law almost everywhere, and even if one construes this marriage to begin at nine, he still violates it. So the state would either have to arrest the Prophet or exempt him and admit that their laws apply to everyone but Muhammad. The latter choice would raise troubling questions. Could society place *any* restrictions on his behavior? Could he marry two-year-olds? Could he murder innocent citizens in, say, drive-by shootings? Could he order accomplices to fly planes into skyscrapers, with no punishment? Maybe. We don't know.

Muhammad's precedent with Aisha is of course a gift to the sexually ill. As *Time* reported, "The law [in Iran] has occasionally been exploited by pedophiles, who marry poor girls from the provinces, use, and then abandon them." [Lisa Beyer, "The Women of Islam," *Time*, Nov. 25, 2001] Similarly, many rich, aging sheikhs from Saudi Arabia married young girls from Hyderabad in India and then raped them in their hotel suites. Overall, it is impossible to calculate the damage done to young lives from the Prophet's lust for a six-young-old girl, 14 centuries ago.

The veil and its three aspects: Muslim women wear "the veil" and it is a sensitive and contentious issue. The non-Islamic world does not understand why they should cover themselves head-to-toe and sweat in warm climates. Muslim men, and their women as well, counter that the veil is not at all uncomfortable and that Allah has imposed this obligation to

help them stay physically and spiritually pure. They also contend that Westerners see no problem with the veil on Christian nuns, so they are hypocritical to criticize Islam for it.

But Muslim women follow the world's strictest dress code. Nothing like it exists anywhere else on earth. Women in China, sub-Saharan Africa, South America all dress relatively freely. But in Iran, police have arrested women who let strands of hair slip into view and some females, even foreigners, have received 80 lashes. In Saudi Arabia, the self-appointed Virtue Police once abused a Saudi princess when they spotted her walking with a maid who lacked a veil. Because of the veil, Mid-Eastern women can see the sun so rarely they get rickets.

Its roots run deep. In an echo of the Pathans, highly committed Muslims equate facial exposure with nudity. "To feel decent and honorable, a Western woman covers much of her body when she goes out in public. The Sohari woman covers body and face," wrote Unni Wikan, a female. "A Western woman need not feel shy to show herself naked before her husband; a Sohari woman need not feel shy to uncover her face in his presence."

This complex issue calls for a detailed discussion, partly since the Quran uses three different words —*hijab*, *khimar*, and *jilbab*— to describe the Muslim woman's defenses against the prying eyes and assaults of strange men. We will discuss each in turn.

1. Let us begin with *hijab*, the best known of these concepts in the West. The word appears in the following verse:

"O ye who believe! Enter not the Prophet's house — until leave is given to you — for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation: But when ye are invited, enter; and when ye have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such (behaviour)

annoys the Prophet: He is ashamed to dismiss you, but Allah is not ashamed (to tell you) the truth.

*And when ye ask (his ladies) for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen [*hijab*]: That makes for greater purity for your hearts and theirs. Nor is it right for you that ye should annoy Allah's Apostle, or that ye should marry his widows after him at any time. Truly such a thing is in Allah's sight an enormity*." [Q 33:53]

As we have noted, every revelation in the Quran had a reason and an occasion. Muhammad revealed the first verse above to himself as he was celebrating his success at acquiring Zainab, the beautiful divorced wife of his adopted son Zaid, at a grand reception in his home in Medina. [Moulvi Muhammad Naimuddin, *Quranul Majid*, p. 616]

The celebration, which honored an event the Pagans considered very harmful to their social order, brings to light one of Muhammad's hitherto overlooked traits: Though he wed many women, he is not reported to ever have thrown a party to welcome any into his harem. And the departure here shows not a welcome, but rather his sadistic pleasure at the success of his scheme to snare Zainab, and it implies he felt similar pleasure in the other unethical maneuvers he used throughout his life.

The verse details party instructions, derived from a celestial Book that Allah wrote long before He began creating the universe. Muhammad's guests sought to arrive before the feast time to glimpse his new, as-yet unwed wife. Their early appearance caused Muhammad a serious problem: Though he wished to spend as much time as possible with the gorgeous Zainab, he had to leave her cabin to give them company. And this he did not like at all and he grew angry.

Similarly, after their meal the guests did not depart immediately. Instead, three of them became engrossed in a conversation. [Moulvi Muhammad Naimuddin, *Quran Majid*, p. 616] Muhammad could not leave them to themselves, and he grew impatient to return to the proud young beauty he craved. His annoyance was likely visible in his face, yet his guests failed to notice it.

But Allah was not insensitive to the Prophet's needs at this important moment. He came to his rescue and through the above revelation He required the three thoughtless guests to leave immediately. Astonishingly, Allah also took the blame for the rudeness, saying that their host was too polite to ask them to leave but He was not.

Allah added that if they needed anything before leaving, they should ask Muhammad's wives from before a screen or *hijab*, for a screen helped keep everyone's hearts pure. (How many women in the West have fallen prey to strange men while openly giving them, say, a glass of water?) This led Karen Armstrong to conclude that "the Koran does not prescribe the veil for all women but only for Muhammad's wives." [Op. cit. p. 158] Allah further notified Muslim men not to marry any the Prophet's wives after he died. It would be an "enormity."

A close reading of the verse makes the following points clear:

Most importantly, Allah put the responsibility for creating and observing the barrier (*hijab*) squarely on his male guests' shoulders. His words read: "When ye ask (his ladies) for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen."

Since Allah issued this instruction to men, men have the duty to erect barriers (*hijab*) before their eyes when asking

anything from or approaching strange women. The latter need not hide themselves behind a hijab. That is, Islam requires a veil only for men, not for women.

How can Muslims have misunderstood this verse so dramatically and for so long? Are men frying in Hell even now for disregarding Allah's wishes? We don't know, but the Muslims' centuries-old mauling of Allah's dictum here reinforces our thesis: The world needs to read the Quran more carefully. We suggest that the pious rulers of Iran and Saudi Arabia begin wearing the veil in public, as an example to less learned Muslims. This verse also indicates that Muhammad's wives did not habitually hide behind screens or barriers while confronting strange men. Otherwise, Allah would not have instructed men to observe hijab to safeguard their purity.

But did the requirement of the screen for Muhammad's wives really come from Allah? We think not, since Allah could have prevented any problems simply through his own Will. But Muhammad couldn't. Hijab was Muhammad's brainchild to keep his sexually starved wives from forging relationships with other men to meet their physical needs. Whether he succeeded in this effort is unknown to the historians of Islam.

Now let us consider the argument about Christian nuns. Individuals who equate Muslim women with nuns make a revealing error. Nuns voluntarily enter into a life of poverty, chastity, obedience, and dedication to the church. They know what to expect in terms of garb, and if they decide they don't like it, they can leave. But Muslim women have no choice and they can leave hijab-oriented societies only with difficulty. Hence, the comparison to Christian nuns is not just a fallacy by Muslim scholars, but a display of oblivion about the true offense: Its universal compulsion.

We have a final question about this verse. Allah sent it down to Muhammad when he was with his guests, with all of his faculties functioning well. He narrated it to his guests as the angel Gabriel relayed it to him.

So why we are told he received all his revelations either in a state of vision, in quasi-dreams, or after convulsions followed by deep trances? [Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 13] Did he lack the time and preparation here to feign such symptoms? Or did subsequent Muslims invent the story of his visionary states to add credibility to his godly doctrines?

2. We now turn to *khimar*, literally "veil." But we must first mention an important "fact" that the Muslim scholars and historians often mention in their attempts to defend Islam and the Quran. And the fact is: Before the arrival of Islam, the Arab Pagans lived in the Times of Ignorance. [Q 33:33] They had no religious book for guidance and no prophet to advise them on key issues. They somehow led their lives knowing little about matters such as good health and hygiene.

When Allah realized their situation, He sent Muhammad to them with the Quranic revelations. He taught them how to carry out their ablutions before their prayer as well as how to purify themselves after attending to nature's calls or having sex. In short, Allah introduced to the Pagans anything and everything they were ignorant about, or were not wont to practicing in their lives. Keeping this fact in mind, let us approach khimar.

It appears from the Quran that Muhammad's wives, even after converting to Islam, continued to follow their Pagan traditions. They acted complaisantly and used seductive words in conversation that spurred men's desire for them (were not the sex-starved women supposed to do that?) They

moved about boisterously and made dazzling display of their beauty to strangers. [Q 33:32-33]

They neither said their islamically mandated regular prayers nor practiced charity. They disobeyed Allah and their husband, the Prophet of Islam. To top it off, they did not "recite what Muhammad rehearsed to them in their homes." [Q 33:34]

To remove these abominations from their lives, Allah approached them directly and told them: *"O Consorts of the Prophet! You are not like any other women and if you fear Allah or your husband, then you will have to change your ways of life, so that I can cure the malaises of your hearts."* [Q 33:32] Whether they paid attention to Allah and actually changed their way of life is not recorded in the Quran.

Allah then instructed Muhammad to tell the rest of Muslims:

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: That will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do." [Q 24:30]

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils [*khimar*] *over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss."*[Q 24:31]

Avoiding eye contact and covering sexual organs are two ways both Muslim men and women can use to reduce adultery or fornication. Allah's knowledge of human sexual behavior prompted Him to ask Muslims of both genders to lower their gaze when facing strangers. He prohibited women from "displaying their figures or appear[ing] in undress except before their husbands, near relatives who would be living in the same house, and with whom a certain amount of negligee is permissible." [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *op. cit*. vol. 2, p. 904] He has also asked them not to display their beauty ["Beauty" is an interpolation of the translator; he may have inserted it to further compel Muslim women to cover themselves with a head-to-toe cloak, or *burqa*. Other translators have not used this word in their translations] and ornaments before anyone but the individuals listed above to protect themselves from their lust.

Believing what Allah had thought were the proper measures to prevent Muslims from committing adultery or fornication, we wonder why He asked only women to cover their bosoms and to refrain from displaying their beauty to the opposite sex? Why did He ask them to hide their ornaments and not strike their feet? And why did He tell Muslim women to draw veils over their bosoms when He also ordered strange men not to gaze at them?

And what does *khimar* really mean? This is a question with consequences for millions of Muslim women. Three of the five English translations we have read [Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, and N. J. Dawood] used "veil" for *khimar*. One translator used "head-coverings," [M.H. Shakir] so according to him Muslim women must wear their

headgear over their breasts. The fifth translator used "shawls." [T.B. Irving]

It is reasonably clear from these examples that "veil" is correct. Even though some translators have varied the term, but all versions convey the same sense as "veil," that is, "a piece of cloth or mesh material" that can hide something on the body.

It is not a society veil, a see-through mesh hung in front of the face and once worn occasionally by Western women. In our understanding, the *khimar* is what is known as *orhni* or *odhani* by the women of the Indian subcontinent. Also called the *dupatta*, it is a piece of cloth that mostly covers the torso.

But why would Allah ask women of Muhammad's time to cover their torsos if all of them were already doing it?

We can only surmise that at least some Pagan women were not, since otherwise the command would be pointless. That tradition continued into the new Muslim society because of women's economic condition and the absence of Quranic prohibition. All Muslim women began to hide their breasts only after Allah told them to.

The verse says that "*they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers*" and the others. Now, we feel no hesitation in asserting that a female body is the finest artistry of nature. Every part of it exudes beauty: feet, legs, gait, hands, bosoms, neck, voice, eyes, face, and hair.

Yet many people deem a woman beautiful only if she has a beautiful face. The face is the focus of a man's attraction, but it is not sexually arousing in the same way that her breasts are. Hence many clever and sensible women have them clinically

enhanced or enlarged. Attractive, sizable breasts also play a vital role in foreplay. Thus many women who lack fine breasts may end up not only having problems with their men, but missing the immense pleasure that can result only from the full preparedness of both parties for their sexual act.

Allah was fully aware of these sexual phenomena. He therefore ordered Muslim women not to expose their breasts to strangers. He required them not to display their beauty except to their husbands and certain other close relatives. How Muslim women were to hide their facial beauty is not clearly mentioned.

However, since most Muslim women today wear dresses that hide their breasts, the Quranic order has lost its purpose. Muslims, therefore, should not bother arguing about what kind of veils their women should wear, and in fact should pay no attention to the wispy pronouncements in the Quran on the matter. They will thereby free themselves from needless tension and make their lives easier.

3. Finally, let us consider *jilbab*. [This word is said to mean 'leather apron or covering;' Ibn Ishaq; op. cit. p. 378] What about the Burqa and headscarf that Muslim women wear today?

We noted earlier that Muslim men are responsible for creating hijab between themselves and women. Yet they have not only almost universally flouted Allah's command, but some have continued molesting women, especially former slaves, despite their conversion to Islam. The women's susceptibility to physical attacks increased on the streets, especially at night. Such men molested or tried to molest women of higher status, including Muhammad's wives. To protect these high-prestige women, Allah decreed:

*"O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments [*jilbab*] over their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."* [Q 33:59]

The verse does not mention the proper form or material for the jilbab. But two facts emerge from it: 1) Muslim women, including Muhammad's wives, had to cast jilbab over their persons before leaving home, and 2) Jilbab was intended to make them "known (as such)," that is, as free women of high status and possibly Muhammad's wives. Allah apparently did not care if the Muslim female slaves faced molestation from their Muslim brethren!

As the Muslim female ex-slaves continued to suffer these attacks, despite wearing an outer garment that distinguished them from slaves, many Muslim men were becoming financially well off, thanks to their plunder of Jews. Now, they could buy fabrics and other goods they could not afford before, from markets in Syria and other lands to which they had been sending their caravans for thousands of years.

Eventually, Muslim men devised a means to protect their female slaves and other women from molesters. It was the *burqa*, whose encompassing volume hid not just their faces from would-be assailants, but much of their bodies. The burqa covered their entire form, except their hands. It allowed them to see the outside world through two small holes in the part over their faces.

The black fabrics in burqas help wearers blended into the darkness of night, thus further thwarting would-be attackers. This color has become almost universal, and today visitors to the purist Islamic State of Saudi Arabia as well as many other

Muslim lands see women moving about under mostly coal-dark tents.

The headscarf was an import. Worn by the nuns of Europe, it became a part of Muslim women's dress after Spain and other European territories fell into Muslim hands.

Muslims adopted it intending to make a religious statement of their own. Its introduction among the European Muslim women was also necessitated, perhaps, by their refusal to don the bulky burqas their sisters-in-faith wore elsewhere. Hence its extensive use mainly by white female Muslims the world over today.

Where does the Quran stand on these matters? The head-to-toe burqa has no sanction in the book. Likewise, the Quran nowhere requires Muslim women to wear a headscarf, at home or outside. The latter custom is not even Islamic and it therefore has no Islamic value or importance.

Even so, the supposed requirement of the burqa still causes Muslim women great detriment. For instance, in 2002 a school building caught fire in Saudi Arabia. Fifteen young girls died in the blaze, not because they couldn't get out, but because the religious police— the Muttawa— wouldn't let them out. They wouldn't let firemen in, either. The reason? The girls' faces weren't sufficiently covered according to Islamic tradition!

This is hardly the first time women have died because of their apparel. During the Algerian civil war, for instance, religious zealots murdered two women at a bus stop because they weren't wearing the veil. Similarly, 15 Muslim militants kidnapped and raped a mother and her two daughters, then slit their throats — the notorious "Kabyle smile" — because they attended a school where females could go unveiled.

Ironically, these women were devout Muslims and wore burqa.

Beyond the dictates of the Quran, advocates of burqa offer a spectrum of rationales. Its more energetic supporters explain it as a boon to Muslim women. It frees them from the leers of men and the whims of fashion, they argue, and by hiding their looks it highlights their character. According to Iranian cleric Ibrahim Amini, it also means wives can "rest assured that their husbands, when not at home, would not encounter a lewd woman who might draw his attention away."

Beneath most of them lies the threatening allure of women, and the deeper the devotion to Allah, it seems, the more exciting they become. Some Ayatollahs have judged the female voice so arousing they keep women silent in mixed gatherings. Geraldine Brooks's *Nine Parts of Desire* (1995) took its title from a remark by Ali, the Shiite icon: "Almighty God created sexual desire in ten parts; then he gave nine parts to women and one to men." This absurd observation reveals more about the speaker than the referent. It is a projection. Adultery rates show that husbands, in the West as well as in the Islamic world, are more likely to be unfaithful than wives.

Here, as with blacks in the Jim Crow South of the United States, the powerful have endowed the suppressed with inordinate lust. This perception simplifies women, distorts their intricate human sensibilities, and makes them seem less recognizable as people, so men can better tolerate their continued suppression.

Other fears animate it too. It partly arises from fear of cuckoldry, for if one can convince people that women are exceptionally lustful, one can better justify imprisoning them in their clothes. And, as we've detailed, fear of rape likely

played a large role, for if Muslims can obliterate the attractiveness of their wives and daughters in public, they lessen the risk of this hard-to-prove crime.

Overall, Muslim women will continue to suffer as nowhere else on earth wherever Islamic societies cling to the Quran.

The Unforbidden: Slavery and Prostitution

Beginning in 869 AD, some 500,000 slaves revolted in the Basra area of southern Iraq. This uprising, known as the Zanj Rebellion, spread to Iran and its leader Ali bin Muhammad adopted the Khazrajite notion that the most pious should rule, even if he were a slave. The rebels freely raided towns and even founded their own capital city, Moktara.

The Abbasids took 15 years to suppress the Zanji, and by the time they finally did, in 883, tens of thousands had died.

Slavery was common in Islam. Muhammad owned slaves and took female concubines in war. As we've seen, Caliph Othman maintained 1,000 slaves, a small army. The Quran, which purports to be a moral document, mentions slavery in 29 verses and does not even treat it as controversial. Allah deems idol worship far more heinous than prostitution or slavery. The Zanji, we assume, disagreed.

War has always been a prime source of slaves, and battlefield captives soon became household servants. But first they had to survive. For instance, when Muhammad bin Qasim defeated Debal in 712 in what is today southern Pakistan, he slaughtered all men over 17 and enslaved their women and children. As historian Philip Carl Salzman observes:

"The evidence is overwhelming that vast numbers of infidel male warriors and civilians were slain, and that most of those spared,

particularly the women and children, were enslaved for domestic and sexual servitude. While men who willingly converted were spared, their wives and children were taken as slaves. In conquered regions, children were regularly taken from parents, while on the borders – especially in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa south of the Sahara – raiding for slaves was normal practice. Of the male slaves, a substantial number were made eunuchs by the removal of sex organs, in order to serve in harems."

[Salzman, *"Why did the Muslim Middle East become so violent?" - http://hnn.us/roundup/comments/46797.html*]

Of course, murdering male infidel captives was a waste of money, though the Quran demands it. Victorious Muslim men could sell them to improve their financial status. Muslim men could sell female slaves as well, and could have sex with them without disturbing their consciences. As we have noted earlier, free Muslim women could also have sex with their male slaves.

The right of Muslim men to have sex with their female slaves is a gift from Allah who expects them to accept it. To please his wives, the Prophet Muhammad once foolishly vowed not to have sex with one of his concubines. Allah reacted angrily to his decision and rebuked him for denying himself a pleasure that Allah had made *halal* or permissible for him and all Muslim men. Allah also took the Prophet's wives to task for forcing him into a vow at odds with His expressed desire.

The Quran recommends decent treatment for slaves, but does not compel it. Muslims presumably can therefore abuse these human beings without incurring the wrath of Allah or endangering their chance of entering the Gardens.

According to Allah, slaves can neither be the partners of their masters nor share the wealth He gives to the latter. [Q 30:28] But after the death of Allah's Prophet, his followers flouted this commandment dramatically, and even let slaves become their masters. For instance, Wasiq, who succeed his father Must'asim as Caliph in 842, and ruled the Muslims until 847 A.D., was a son of Karatis, a Greek slave of his father. The Mamluks in Egypt were a dynasty descended from palace slaves.

As history shows, slavery and prostitution evolved out of poverty. For instance, sex trafficking has revived in the desperate country of Iraq. Its prostitution underworld, according to *Time*, [See its issue of March 7, 2009] is a place where "nefarious female pimps hold sway and where impoverished mothers sell their teenage daughters into a sex market that believes that females who reach the age of 20 are too old to fetch a good price. The youngest victims, some ages 11 and 12, are sold for as much as $30,000, while others can go for as little as $2,000."

This fusion of slavery and prostitution may exist in hidden corners everywhere, but it is rarely as conspicuous as in Iraq—and indeed the Islamic world in general. Prostitution itself is of course ubiquitous. But it is more rampant in poorer countries, though richer nations do not lag far behind, despite the vast wealth in their coffers. It continues because promiscuous males need it to satisfy their sexual hunger. Many females become prostitutes not just because of poverty, but also because of male chauvinism and deception. And the highly restrictive world that Muslims inhabit actually creates a greater market for prostitutes, since it increases demand for their services.

In certain prosperous countries, wealthy females are now trying to reverse men's dominance over their minds and bodies. They are encouraging male prostitution, and it is becoming a vogue in some societies. Males practice this trade primarily for the sake of money and, secondarily, to enjoy sex with affluent and beautiful women at the latter's expense!

The Quran condemns fornication and adultery, prescribing punishments for those who indulge in these acts. It also asks them not to force female slaves into prostitution if they don't want it. But Allah did not consider slavery a terrible practice and, consequently, did not try to end it through His Glorious Quran. To Him, disbelief was more despicable than either prostitution or slavery. Accordingly, He applied all His force to exterminating Unbelief — which could threaten a human like Muhammad, but not an all-powerful Allah — and allowed prostitution and slavery to persist among the people He considered wicked and unkind.

Allah did not abolish prostitution and slavery among the Arabs because, if He had, He would have alienated upper-class idolaters who indulged in these practices and whom He wanted to win over to His side. At a later stage, Allah realized that He also needed the support of the slaves— and the downtrodden— to strengthen His religion. Therefore, He granted the slaves the right to buy back their freedom from their masters if they could afford it. To make His decision appealing to the slaves, Allah mildly prodded their masters to grant their slaves freedom if and when they wished to please Him, with their acts of putative generosity.

As it happens, slavery hurts economies. Historians have long known that it probably prevented the ancient world from developing technology, since if a slave could do work as

cheaply as a machine, there was no need to make the machine. But slavery also hurts societies because it creates inequalities of wealth. We measure a society's wealth not just in terms of fixed amounts, like dollars, but of how fast that money circulates. Thus, where people store their money under the mattress and don't spend it, economies suffer.

Similarly, where societies don't provide money for all classes of people to spend, they lose wealth too. End slavery and give former slaves the chance to earn money, and they will spend it, with the result that everyone gets richer.

Slavery lasted in the Muslim world long after it had ended elsewhere. It continued through the middle of the 20th century when, under moral pressure from the nations of the non-believers, the last Muslim countries banned it. If the brave warriors of Islam had annihilated the Unbelievers, we would no doubt see slave markets on public streets even today.

Know-Nothingism in the Subtropics:

Islam is an Empty Quarter for knowledge

Journalist Thomas Friedman notes, *"There is not a single world-class university or scientific research center in the entire Arab world."* [Thomas Friedman, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, p. 104] Turkey is one of Islam's most scientifically advanced nations, yet between 1996 and 2005, its scientists published an average of 8,800 research papers per year — less than the output of a single Ivy League school. Overall, Muslim nations spend on average of 0.38% of their national wealth on science, compared to 0.73% in developing countries. [Ehsan Masood, "New Wave for Islamic Science," *http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7892626.stm*]

This feeble performance is not the result of poverty. Many Arab states earn vast amounts every year from oil and they rarely funnel much into education. [Though this may be changing as some states realize the oil bonanza is running out and seek a more modern economy] India, despite its postcolonial poverty under Nehru, created a string of first-rate universities. The outstanding scientists and engineers who emerged from them have made Indian high-tech companies competitive globally and helped its economy soar. We see nothing similar in the Islamic world.

In fact, in Muslim nations, ignorance and illiteracy remain typical. Why?

Knowledge rests on uncertainty. If you know something, you are always ready to admit error and update your knowledge if new evidence requires it. In the most famous example in science, Newton's concept of gravity required an update by Einstein's theory of relativity. Scientists did not object that Einstein's insights were eternal and beyond challenge. Instead, they examined Einstein's evidence, found it compelling, and accepted it. In fact, scientists are constantly revising their knowledge, and that's why science has progressed so far and brought such revolutionary changes to our lives.

Conversely, faith rests on certainty. Devout Muslims are so certain about the truth of the Quran that they admit no possibility of error even though a plenty of it can be found in it. No evidence will make them change their minds, for their opinions do not arise from evidence in the first place. Faith comes from authority and only authority can lead to changes, as when the Catholic Church dropped the requirement of eating fish on Fridays.

When a state rests on religion, or derives important support from it, that state tends to enforce its certainties. Skepticism can weaken its pillars, so the government tends to treat doubt as similar to treason. But doubt breeds knowledge and is thus invaluable. So in such cultures, knowledge becomes greatly undervalued. And since the modern world derives so much of its energy from "knowledge economies," knowledge in fact is wealth, and states that rest on religion tend to be poorer.

Islam arose 14 centuries ago and the Quran, like the Bible, embodies the ignorance of its time. For instance, it claims that Allah gives life to the dead earth and produces from it orchards, date palms, and vines. Back then no one had the slightest knowledge of chlorophyll and how it let plants extract energy from sunlight and grow. Likewise, no one had an inkling of DNA and how it creates proteins and the apparatus of life. A single date palm seemed beyond explanation. So Allah/Muhammad took the credit for it. [The Quran, 56:63-64: "See ye the seed that ye sow in the ground? Is it ye that cause it to grow, or are we the Cause?"] Science today has shown how date palms work, and Allah plays no part in it.

But any culture that insists Allah is responsible for all of their affairs will look no further, and thus will not learn. In fact, it will typically punish courageous thinkers who try to discover the truth. And, as we know, Islamic thinkers did not discover the secrets of chlorophyll and DNA. If the whole world had been strictly Muslim since Muhammad's time, no one would have learned about them.

The Quran is also clear about the origin of human beings. Allah created them as special gifts to the world. Hence the fact that we all descended from apes on the African savanna is

repulsive to a great many Muslims. Opinions vary widely on this issue in the Islamic world, and Muslims are hardly a monolith. But creationism has gained wide traction.

It is especially strong in more advanced countries, since it has been unnecessary so far in nations that don't bother to teach biology to the students. Over the last 20 years, for instance, creationism has begun appearing in the Turkish high school science textbooks. Turkey has also been the source of the work of Harun Yahya, which some believe is a pseudonym for Adnan Oktar. But Harun Yahya issues a Mississippian output — hundreds of books, magazines, articles, DVDs per year — and Taner Edis, author of *An Illusion of Harmony*, notes tartly they are beyond the capacity of one man and clearly represent a movement under cover. [Interview, *www.salon.com / books/feature/2007/08/13/taner_edis/index1.html*]

Ironically, Adnan must rely on the studies and findings of the infidels for his treatises on Islamic Science, as he cannot find any among his co-religionists.

Evolution is the foundation of biology. Without a grasp of natural selection, no one can understand how and why organisms developed as they did. The phenomenon of drug resistance in tuberculosis, for instance, makes no sense, except as a trick by Allah to frustrate human efforts toward better health and cause more death. Young Muslims with scientific ambitions must learn evolution or they will find it harder to succeed.

In a set of remarkable passages in the Quran, Allah also tells His audience:

"*And the Sun runs his course for a period determined for him: That is the decree of (Him), the exalted in Might, the All-Knowing*." [Q 36:38]

"*The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs*." [Q 36:40]

"*And made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun as a (Glorious) Lamp*." [Q 71:16]

Unsure of the exact meaning of the Arabic word *mustaqarr* or "run his course" in the first verse above, translators have used different English words for it. N.J. Dawood and Mohammed Pickthall thought it meant "to hasten to a resting place." Rashad Khalifa thought it meant "to set in a specific location." Maulana Abul Ala Maududi settled on "to proceed to its destination."

But as the second verse makes clear, with its reference to the separate orbits of the sun and the moon, Allah was claiming that the sun revolves around the earth. The sun rests at night to prepare to begin its race the following day.

How could Allah have committed this blunder? How could the All-Knowing not have known the basic structure of the solar system? To devout Muslims, the answer must forever be a mystery.

But the curious fact about this mistake is: A human liar in the 7th century would have made exactly the same error. Allah had the chance here to reveal an indisputable fact and bolster His case against all other lesser gods, whose existence He admits, [Q 37:125] and religions. But He couldn't, because His knowledge began and ended with Muhammad's.

Allah makes further, similar errors. He says, "*We have decked the lower heaven with constellations. They guard it against rebellious devils, so that they may not listen in to those on high.*" [Q 37:7-8] Just as a human observer would before the invention of the telescope, Allah asserts that the stars are all the same

distance away, whereas in fact their distance varies greatly and the pattern of the constellations is simply an artifact. So He did not know how distant stars like Betelgeuse actually are. But let us assume that He did. In that case, the Gardens are beyond any star we can see with the naked eye, that is, at least 500 light-years away. They lie out in cold space, closer to thousands of other stars and solar systems than to us. Why Allah would have placed them at this extraordinary distance from His beloved creations on earth is a mystery.

He adds in the same verse, "*Eavesdroppers are pursued by fiery comets*." This news raises curious questions, such as: Why did Allah call comets "fiery" when they are actually balls of ice? Of course, they looked fiery to primitive human observers on earth, but that is only because the solar wind blows tiny ice particles behind them in a tail. And why do eavesdroppers always follow a parabolic orbit around the sun, approaching it closely and then flying off into space? It seems a bizarre course, but Muslim clerics must explain it since comets follow that trajectory in pursuit. Since we can calculate the course, why don't the comets intercept the eavesdroppers, instead of pointlessly following them? What are these eavesdroppers doing so far away from the Gardens, which lie beyond Betelgeuse? Why are the eavesdroppers invisible? And why does the All-powerful Allah worry about eavesdroppers at all? These questions are bewildering — unless one assumes that Allah knew no more than Muhammad, in which case, their answers become instantly clear.

About the structure of the celestial world, Allah says: "*See ye not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another*." [Q 71:16.]

The ancients thought visible items in the sky spun around the earth in a nested set of seven invisible spheres. The sun had one for instance, and so did the moon. These spheres accounted for their different rates of revolution, and the English term "seventh heaven" or highest heaven is a relic of this time. Of course, modern telescopes have proven these spheres imaginary and an omniscient Allah would have known that fact. Muhammad would not. Yet, strangely, Allah put "seven "heavens" in the sky in the form of solid structures, [Cf. Q 34:9] like the concrete roofs of our homes, and made the very mistake Muhammad would have.

Allah even errs with the obvious. In the second verse above, He says, "The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon." Of course, these two bodies appear to pass each other in the sky every 29 days, and whenever there is a solar eclipse, we actually witness the sun overtake the moon. Even a desert shepherd could have pointed out Allah's mistake here, but he might well have refrained, for this blasphemy could have earned him death from the Most Merciful.

Allah's errors are especially disturbing because He created the cosmos. [The Quran, 2:29: "It is He Who hath created for you all things that are on earth; Moreover, His design comprehended the heavens, for He gave order and perfection to the seven firmaments; and of all things He hath perfect knowledge."] He was not just a neglectful observer. The universe is His child. It is as if Charles Dickens were to say that *David Copperfield* was about a blind man who went to Africa or Bill Clinton were to insist that his daughter's name was "Sally."

Even so, Allah's "deep" knowledge of science has given pious Muslims and their scholars an excuse to dump the

world's scientists in the trash for saying that the sun is stationary (relative to the solar system), and that the earth, the third planet from the sun, spins on its axis every 24 hours. In the Western world, historians view the Copernican revolution as a pivot point, the first great breakthrough of science. But fundamentalist Muslims dwell in the world of Ptolemy—because Muhammad dwelt there.

Many Muslims disdain science and the achievements of its infidels. Ignoring both science and English, they invest all their energy in learning Arabic and innumerable disciplines related to Islam. Long-irrelevant Islamic doctrines like hijab dominate their lives and their world-view remains stagnant. Consequently, most Muslim countries produce more religious teachers and preachers than scientists, doctors, and engineers.

Few of the Muslim clergy, also known as *ulemas* ("the learned"), have ever done anything tangible to improve the people's health, ease of life, or economic well-being. Instead, they have helped divide people into often deadly factions. Because so many Muslims ignore the scientific discoveries that continue to burgeon all around us, they have learned little that can help their people lead reasonably manageable lives on our ever-changing planet.

Muslims fly on airplanes and use electric appliances like everyone else. One might think that the all-wise, beneficent Allah might have provided these boons early on for His faithful, but He didn't. He could have, obviously, but for millennia He refused to light people's homes, speed their transportation, widen their range of communication. Allah knew about penicillin and vaccines, but He watched coldly and did nothing as countless Muslims died from infections and other preventable diseases. It was the Unbelievers, whom

the Quran urges Muslims to kill who brought these benefits to them. The Unbelievers have saved countless Muslim lives and brought them to the fold of civility, yet Muslims think these people are their worst enemy. An Eastern proverb amply describes their attitude: "They are ready to cut off the very hands that feed them."

It is thus ironic to see the current movement to "Islamicize science." The phrase covers a wide swath of meanings, but in every case it is an effort to give Islam control over science. Some Muslims say we should merge the sciences with the spiritual aspect of Islam and investigate them together. However, the very separation of science from religion in the West at the time of Copernicus began its long successful journey. More subtly, others want to merge "ethics" into science. Where would ethics come from?

Almost certainly from the Quran and Hadith, and hence religious authorities could use the Quran to strangle inquiry. In the West, for instance, it is hard to imagine a science, based on Biblical ethics, giving rise to the theory of natural selection!

The education of children: Muslim children face an assortment of Islamic obstacles to gaining a good and practical education, but here we will focus on two: *Madrasas* and mothers.

The Arabic term *madrasa* means a "school" where Quran and other tenets of Islam are taught. After al-Qaeda became a household name in 2001, Westerners began to look into the *Madrasas* to find out what they actually teach. They found that these schools breed intolerance everywhere, but they are a special problem in areas like northern Pakistan where no other elementary secular schools exist. There, bright children who want to learn have no other option. And once in the *Madrasas*,

teachers encourage them to memorize the entire Quran and gain the title of *Hafez*. Students also study the Hadith and various commentaries on the verses of the Quran, but they learn little else. Such an education equips them mainly to teach Islam to others, yet it also creates a world-view centered on Islam and perpetuates the cycle of ignorance. For ignorance is just the absence of knowledge. In almost every case, error colonizes this blankness, and rampant, systematized error is the signal of institutionalized ignorance.

Muslims face a second problem. As if admitting that knowledge is real power, many Muslim countries either discourage girls from acquiring modern education or bar them from contact with male teachers or students. However, they do highly encourage girls to gain a religious education, preferably within their homes. Many non-Arab Muslim countries also lay more stress on girls learning Arabic — the language of the Quran — than their own native tongue. Authorities do so by emphasizing that correctly understanding the Quran will help them enter the Gardens, where they will compete with the gorgeous Hurs for their husbands' attention.

On earth, these ignorant girls grow up to be ignorant mothers. They are thus unable to pass on knowledge to their children at home. So unlike the West, where a father and a mother can both pass on important knowledge to their children, in Muslim nations only the father can do it, provided he is educated. It is yet another way Islam maims itself by maiming its women.

Illiteracy: As we have noted, illiteracy has played havoc with Muslims, especially the poorer ones. For instance, until the middle of the 20th century, the Indian sub-continent lay under the British rule. English thus became the official

language of the Indian government. It also entered schools as the medium of instruction and learning. Indian Hindus were wise enough to recognize the worldwide importance of English and to integrate it into their learning process. Muslims, on the other hand, shunned it totally, because their religious gurus had told them that English was the language of the infidels and that all who learned it would writhe in the flames of Hell. This boycott retarded the lives of Muslims. They remained far behind socially and economically while Hindus climbed the ladder of progress and prosperity. One has only to look at the great software companies like Infosys in Bangalore or the rise of call centers and other highly profitable offshoots of globalization to see the value of English. In contrast, the Indian Muslims will not attain equivalent advances for generations. On the whole, they are still reeling from the lingering effects of their religious taboos, a fact that is clear from the living conditions of a vast majority of the Indian Muslims today.

Ironically, though they uphold the Quran as the primary document of their faith, most Muslims, regardless of their educational background, do not understand its true meaning.

In fact, they don't even try. Many believe that attempting to understand it would be tantamount to departing from their faith. Therefore, they prefer to read the Quran in its original language, Arabic, rather than their own tongue. The implication is: If I understand it, I'll respect it less.

Evidence shows they are right. For instance, Arabic-speaking people do understand its true meaning. As a result, they are less enthusiastic about its sanctity than those Muslims who do not grasp it at all. Even so, the Arabs have always refrained from divulging its true significance to others and

they will likely continue to do so to maintain their hegemony over a vast population of the ignorant. That dominance gives them major advantages, since they control two of the most sacred and profitable Muslim shrines on earth. Revealing the truth would deprive them of the huge financial windfalls these shrines have always generated, from far back in time when they had nothing else to produce revenue from. These holy sites have also symbolized their religious authority, to be honored by all who wish to live and die as Muslims.

We believe that most people, whether Muslims or not, want to know the truth. But to maintain the weeds of ignorance and prevent the flowers of truth from blooming, Islam, more than other religions, has used coercion to prevent its followers from knowing the truth about it. To this end, it has deployed two major tools from the outset: 1) the savage criminalization of blasphemy and 2) espionage.

Blasphemy: On June 3, 2006, Pakistan banned the film *The Da Vinci Code,* deeming it blasphemous. Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia outlawed it too, and China pulled it after a highly profitable opening, apparently out of concern for its sizable Muslim population. A few other governments, such as Sri Lanka and the municipality of Manila, also forbade it.

Of course, the themes of *The Da Vinci Code* are not Islamic but Christian. And though Christian fundamentalists and the Vatican vilified it, hundreds of millions in Christian nations went to see it. No major Christian country banned it. So the question arises: If Christians tolerated it, why didn't Muslims? Why were they, of all people, most active in punishing blasphemy in the Unbelievers' creed?

The superficial answer is that the Quran says Jesus Christ was a prophet — though his followers defiled his teaching and he was not the equal of Muhammad. Yet since the Quran deems him holy, the perceived attacks on Christianity in *The Da Vince Code* were blasphemous to Islam as well!

But the real answer to the question lies elsewhere: The Muslim nations are simply more vigorous about suppressing blasphemy, period. Their governments are used to doing it, and because of a long habit, violent reactions to blasphemy come naturally to them. And of course their citizens lack First Amendment protections.

What is blasphemy? Ultimately, it is a statement that offends religious sensibilities. And since religious sensibilities rest on illusion, on a brittle certainty, many direct statements can qualify. In this context, the Quran says:

"*If thou dost question them they declare (with emphasis): 'We were only talking idly and in play.' Say: 'Was it at Allah, and His Signs, and His Apostle, that ye were mocking?*' [Q 9:65]

"*Make ye no excuses: Ye have rejected Faith after ye accepted it. If We pardon some of you, We will punish others amongst you, for that they are in sin.*" [Q 9:66]

The first verse inveighs against good humor. Muslims cannot laugh freely or make any jokes even slightly related to Islam, for a third person could construe them as mockery of Allah, His revelations, and His Apostle that require an exemplary punishment.

The second verse tells us that people's explanations for their laughter or playful acts were mere "excuses" to Allah and largely irrelevant. Those He wanted to put to death, He charged them with blasphemy as well as with rejecting Islam

after accepting it. One would think that the All-knowing Allah would instantly know the difference between a well-meaning and sarcastic joke, but the first verse indicates either that: 1) He didn't, or 2) He thought well-meaning jokes were so crippling to the spread of Islam, despite the great military conquests and His total power to spread it Himself, that He had to punish utterly innocent humans for making them.

Blasphemy and apostasy are grave crimes in Islam. When Muhammad wanted to get people out of his way, he charged them with these offenses, since the penalty for either was death. It is difficult for us to say how many people Muhammad aka Allah might have executed under this inhuman law in his time.

Moreover, just with death begins their punishment, for on the Day of Judgment they will stand assembled on the plains of A'raf, which lie between the Hell and the Gardens and act as a holding place for humans whose fate Allah will decide after a thorough investigation. While carrying out His inquiry, He will taunt them and thrash them, and then send them either up to the Gardens or down to the hideous fires of Hell where they will bake forever.

(Conversely, commission of a sin does not call for death sentence. Therefore, whomever Allah wanted to let off with a warning not to offend Him in future, He charged with sin. In other words, Allah used sins as a bargaining chip; by charging His enemies with a sin and then pardoning them, He gave new leases on their lives — acts that left them in His debt and made them His permanent slaves.)

The punishment Muhammad prescribed for his desert tribe over 1,400 years ago haunts millions of people today. The strict Sharia law, which some Muslim countries have

introduced to regulate their peoples' lives, similarly prescribes death for all acts of blasphemy against Allah, Muhammad, and the Quran. Blasphemy against Muhammad is more serious than against Allah. And proving an act of blasphemy is easy. Four Muslim men simply testify to it before a *qadi* (judge). This is enough for a *qadi* to sentence the accused to death, or to some other serious punishment he deems appropriate.

The puritanical Islamic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long followed the Quranic laws. There, the authorities lop off the hands of the thieves and the heads of blasphemers in the public squares, and invite people to watch. The Saudis proclaim that their manner of execution is the most civilized on earth. It ought to be, Muslims believe, since the Quranic laws were good for Muhammad's time, are good for today, and will remain good forever. Pakistan also prescribed death for blasphemy, and everyone knows of the infamous fatwa issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini against novelist Salman Rushdie.

These penalties are ridiculous on their face, since whatever injury Islam suffers from criticism is minimal compared to the loss of a life. The punishment grossly exceeds the offense. Islam itself is not a person and so feels nothing, but even the wounded feelings of the devout do not remotely approach death in seriousness.

The penalties against blasphemy are actually blasphemous themselves, for they confess insecurity about Islam. Truth is resilient. It can stand criticism. Darwin's theory of natural selection has only grown over time, despite massive, organized hostility, because the evidence for it has grown. Criticism has not only endangered Darwin's theory, but it has

strengthened it. Because theory has survived attacks so well, it is extremely believable. Ideas that have not gone through such criticism are less credible.

However, criticism does threaten fabrications. Liars fear the media and honest people don't. Muhammad's harsh penalties against blasphemy reflect not confidence about his revelations, but weakness. We believe he always knew his foundation was vapor and hence feared and sought to eliminate criticism wherever he found it. Because of those anxieties so long ago, Karachi filmgoers never saw *The Da Vinci Code*!

Espionage: No one can fully kill independence of thought. But dictators have always used internal spies to minimize its communication and channel people toward a belief no one freely embraces. The master's whip is a fine and noble thing. Hence, following the pattern Allah had set for Himself, He told Muhammad:

"*Among them are men who molest the Prophet and say, 'He is (all) ear.' Say, 'He listens to what is best for you: He believes in Allah, has faith in the Believers, and is a Mercy to those of you who believe.' But those who molest the Apostle will have a grievous penalty*." [Q 9:61]

This verse confirms that Muhammad was a notorious spymaster, and we know it from the history books. He maintained a large network of informers rather like the East German Stasi, spread over all the areas of his interest. They brought him news of his opponents' words, plans, and actions. These ongoing violations of privacy undermined trust and free expression, and offended some of his followers. When they complained, Allah instructed the Prophet to tell them:

"*Seest thou not that Allah doth know (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but*

He makes the fourth among them, - nor between five but He makes the sixth, - nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wheresoever they be: In the end will He tell them the truth of their conduct, on the Day of Judgment. For Allah has full knowledge of all things." [Q 58:7]

Hearing this chilling disclosure and threat, followers who had questioned his spying panicked [Verse number 4:108 says Allah spied on Muhammad's opponents by sitting in their midst to learn about their plans against the Prophet] and sought to placate him by assuring him that they fully believed in his leadership as well as in his abilities. To convince him that they were true to their words, they swore by Allah, believing it would also please His Prophet.

But they misjudged their leader. Swearing by Allah alone insulted Muhammad, for it left him out. The Quran says, "*To you they swear by Allah. In order to please you: But it is more fitting that they should please Allah and His Apostle, if they are believers*." That is, since Allah was none other than Muhammad himself, the latter told them: In the future, swear both by me and Allah, as swearing by, and believing in, one of us does not make you a good Believer!

Why did Muhammad need spies? The answer is either: 1) Allah actually does not know everything and was lying when he said He did, or 2) Allah knew the thoughts of everyone important to Muhammad, but refused to reveal them. If the first is correct, we can't trust anything He says in the Quran. If the second is correct, we have to question His commitment to Muhammad's cause.

In any case, knowledge advances through doubt and the freedom to disagree. Any system meant to root out doubt stifles progress. But knowledge also advances through free-

flowing communication, through the testing of ideas with others, the sifting of responses, and the weighing of arguments. Science in particular is a group endeavor. Without free discussions, good ideas can die in the originator's mind. We assume that Allah intended them to die.

Laggards in the World Economy

If we look at the world today, we notice a striking fact: Allah has rewarded the Unbelievers with better health, longer lives, and greater comfort. Indeed, He has showered them with wealth, making them much, much richer than the Believers overall so that He can punish the Unbelievers on the Day of Judgment. [Cf. Q 46:20] He has kept most Believers' nations in the Third World beartrap while the infidel world thrives. Hence the average Unbeliever has far more of everything than the average Believer. If there is a paradise on earth, it lies in the land of the Unbelievers. This despite Allah's assurance that "those who invent a lie against Allah will never prosper" [Q 10:69]

Why has Allah been so kind to the infidels and so harsh to His flock? There are a number of possible answers, among them: 1) Allah is a liar and a hypocrite, 2) Muhammad twisted Allah's message, 3) The assemblers of the Quran misread those scribblings on rocks and leaves, 4) Allah is disgusted by the obsequiousness of the devout, and 5) Allah is punishing Muslims for not using the common sense He gave them and instead adhering blindly to the Quran. Certainly, if the latter is correct, Muslims are not learning from their punishment.

We have already seen many more earthly reasons for their poverty: The status of women, slavery, sub-par education, illiteracy, hostility to doubt and science, insistent belief in falsehoods. Yet another problem is alms.

***Alms*:** Allah narrated: *"And when they are told, 'Spend ye of (the bounties) with which Allah has provided you,' the Unbelievers say to those who believe: 'Shall we then feed those whom, if Allah had so willed, He would have fed, (Himself)? Ye are in nothing but manifest error.'"* [Q 9:62]

Allah repeatedly claimed that it was He who provides sustenance to all of His creations and His listeners believed it. But at one stage, He asked them to feed indigents whom He Himself had failed to feed. Spotting a major contradiction, the Unbelievers asked: You claim that you feed all, but now you want us to feed people you have deliberately denied food to. How come?

The question asked by the Unbelievers in the 7th century remains unanswered to this day, but almsgiving is one of the most virtuous acts in Islam and the Quran repeatedly exhorts Muslims to do it. A form of charity called *zakat* is one of the five pillars of the Muslim faith; without practicing it, a somewhat affluent Muslim cannot remain a Muslim. Islam essentially requires the distribution of *zakat* among the Muslim beggars and indigents.

Poverty, therefore, is essential to Islam. Without it, affluent Muslims cannot comply with a pillar of their faith. Consequently, the eradication of poverty does not occupy a central position in the development strategies of many orthodox Muslim countries, for, they reckon, without poverty Islam would lose one of its main supports and fall apart.

The requirement of *zakat* in Islam no doubt arose from Muhammad's own poverty, though Jews of Medina also practiced it. He spent the days after Khadija's death in great hardship, surviving on whatever his hard-pressed and struggling followers and relatives could spare for him. And

when he arrived penniless in Medina, he faced a mountain of problems; here he needed to find people who were willing to support his and his followers' existence.

Muhammad found homes and food for his followers from Mecca with the new Medinese Muslims who were willing to share whatever they had with their brethren in faith. They also agreed to play host to him for so long as he could find no livelihood for himself and his followers, though they themselves lived hand to mouth.

Muhammad found it almost impossible to get jobs for the Meccan emigrants, as most of them knew no trade other than providing water and other services to visitors to the Kaba. In Medina, they became useless. Muhammad himself had business experience, but no one in Medina was willing to organize a caravan for him to lead, travel, and trade.

In short, the economic condition of the Muslim emigrants and their leader was no better than in Mecca. They often went to bed hungry or with just a few dates in their stomach. Near-starvation was rousing dissatisfaction and doubt among his followers who naturally wondered why Allah was withholding food, work, and money from them. Allah came to Muhammad's aid and told him to declare to Jews and other wealthy people of Medina:

"*Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (Thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom*." [Q 9:60]

The Arabic word *sadaqa*, or "alms" in English, is important here. It is different from *zakat*, the tithe that all well-to-do Muslims must pay once a year for distribution among the

Muslim population of the Islamic and non-Islamic states. The rate of *zakat* is universal, and it is usually 2% of merchandise and 10% on the fruits of the earth. These funds go strictly to indigent Muslims; their distribution among non-Muslims is not at all desirable.

Sadaqa, on the other hand, is voluntary and has no fixed rate. Muslims can give in *sadaqa* whatever they like or can afford in order to propitiate the angry Allah and alleviate people's sufferings. To the Urdu- and Bengali-speaking people of the Indian subcontinent, it is known as *khairat*.

Muslims beggars can collect *sadaqa* from non-Muslims as well. Hence on the Indian subcontinent they place themselves at street intersections with begging bowls in their hands and implore alms from motorists and passers-by. The generous give them alms unconcerned about the mendicants' religion. They act the same way when beggars come to their doorsteps: They give whatever money or items they find close at hand.

Of late, begging has become a highly profitable industry in some parts of the world. It is especially so in the great cities of the Indian subcontinent. Here, mafia groups control most beggars. They also oversee the most lucrative locations, those where beggars can gain more alms than elsewhere. At the end of the day, beggars give a portion of their collections to the mafiosi who control and "protect" them, so they can return to the same spot the next day. If they refuse to pay, the gangsters may not only prevent them from begging anywhere in the city, but may even murder them.

In desperation, Muhammad acted like a Mafia Supremo in his time and did virtually everything mafia leaders do today. He deployed his followers to collect alms from Jews, but tolerated no complaint from his gangs of beggars when he

stole from their collections in the name of administering them for their benefit. Muhammad also likely used the distribution of alms as patronage, to reward the more ardent followers and punish the doubtful.

When the beggars persisted with their complaints, he accused them of being indignant, a crime sure to bring Allah's wrath down on them. On the other hand, had they been "content with what Allah and His Apostle gave them," and had they said, "Sufficient unto us is Allah," [Q 9:59] He would not have scolded them. Instead, He would have bestowed His mercy on them, thus alleviating their suffering and hunger!

Through another revelation, Muhammad not only exonerated himself, but demanded that his followers feel satisfied with whatever he and Allah gave them. In setting forth the Muslim beggars' complaints, the verse quoted above clearly implies that he had cheated some out of their hard-won earnings.

He used the ill-gotten money to bring to Islam those Pagans "whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth)." In explaining the meaning of this phrase, Abul Ala Maududi writes:

"The phrase means 'to charm, captivate.' The order meant that those people who are actively engaged in the opposition of Islam, but their forceful opposition can be extinguished by giving them money, or when there are such people in the camp of the infidels whose opposition can be broken and made sympathetic to Islam, or those people who accepted Islam but are likely to revert back to their previous religion due to financial reasons, such people should be given regular stipends or allowances to turn them into helpers, followers, or at least harmless to the causes of Islam."

He is describing bribery. We believe that people of other religions have used similar methods to induce people into their faith. But we know of no major religion on earth that deprived beggars of the fruits of their hard labor to serve the cause of Allah. Such conduct smacks of certain Western cults. It is despicable.

Apart from taking a share from the beggars' daily pot, Muhammad also accepted money from those who wished him to cleanse them of their sins and purify them with his prayers. The alms for "purifying and sanctifying" these individuals were his to keep; he shared them with no one. To justify this practice, Muhammad announced: "*Know they not that Allah doth accept repentance from His votaries and receives their gifts of charity, and that Allah is verily He, the Oft-returning, Most Merciful.*"

Like many other verses of the Quran, this one pulls back the curtain and shows us the manipulator behind the fiery Wizard. For in religion, only Allah or God can accept man's repentance. Because Allah or God is self-sufficient, the question of His accepting gifts from them does not arise. So why would Allah receive any gifts of charity from humans — unless He were Muhammad who desperately needed them to support his way of life?

***Fatalism*:** While ordaining charity, the Quran does not consider the negative effect of poverty on a people and nation. Believing in the Quran and judging poverty a virtue, Muslims for generations found it unnecessary to strive to better their fortune. They preferred to remain content with whatever Allah gave them. While their inertia held them back, their contemporaries who believed in improving their lot through their own efforts achieved great wealth, power, and prestige.

These people now rule the world and practice charity to mitigate the sufferings of those human beings, Muslims included, they consider unfortunate.

In contrast to other people and nations that struggled hard to ameliorate their positions, Muslims deemed it appropriate, due to their religious convictions, to keep inflicting poverty on themselves. Indeed, many Muslim nations bartered away their self-esteem, political independence, and sovereignty to please those benefactors whose charity they needed for economic survival. Consequently, they now find themselves virtual slaves of their sustainers.

If Muslims fail to act as necessary and find themselves enslaved and exploited, they should blame themselves rather than their exploiters, as they are fond of doing. They should know that the poor and the weak have always been, and forever will be, exploited by the rich and the strong. This is an aspect of human nature. Allah could change it, though He never has, and those people who prefer a self-imposed subservience mentality will never clearly change it on their own.

***Insularity*:** Muslims should also heed the numerous lessons of economic history, including their own. The Umayyads ushered in an age of economic prosperity partly because, like the Romans, they controlled a vast territory with few barriers to trade, something like a southerly European Union. Camels and ships carried silk from China, slaves from the Caucasus, gold from Ghana, cotton from Egypt, wheat from Morocco, and much more all across the empire. Essential trade devices like bills of lading and joint stock companies emerged.

The analogy today is globalization. Nations that develop worldwide trading ties increase their prosperity, just as the

Umayyads did, but without the expenditure of military force. However, Muslims will remain at a disadvantage as long as they continue to listen to the Quran, for it orders them to kill the very people they should be cultivating. No other major religion on earth so starkly separates Believers and Unbelievers. Islamic nations need to open to the world, much as Japan did after the Meiji Restoration in 1856. But so far the words of a man from the 7th century have kept them shell bound.

***The hajj*:** We have seen how Mecca enjoys an ongoing bonanza from hajj. But its influx of money has to come from somewhere, and the flip side of its enrichment is the impoverishment of other Muslim nations.

Consider Bangladesh. It is a small country whose over 150 million people live on just 144,000 sq. km. of land. Here, unemployment is rampant. Per capita income in 2008 was $599.1 Hence the government of Bangladesh needs foreign help even for small projects, like the immunization of its children. It can neither buy important diagnostic equipment for its hospitals nor feed a large number of its land-less and job-less poor. They find jobs in distant lands, often at the risk of their lives, to support themselves and their families back home.

Yet in 2009 Bangladesh plans to send 65,000 of its Muslim citizens to Mecca to perform their hajj, and will give at least 15,000 of them a cut-rate fare on government-owned or chartered airlines. Each of these 15,000 subsidized travelers will pay Tk.220, 550.00 or about $3,150.00 to the government to cover airfare, simple lodging in Mecca, and a royalty to the Saudi government. In addition, each pilgrim will pay about $300 for at least one sacrificial animal and various other

expenses during his or her stay there. Overall, each of these 15,000 people will spend at least $3,450.00 on hajj, or about $52 million total.

The remaining 50,000 pilgrims will not be entitled to government's discount fares and will travel on their own. Many will fly business class and stay in expensive Meccan hotels, and we can reasonably estimate the outlay per person at around $5,000. In all, these 50,000 Bangladeshis will spend approximately $250 million on their hajj. Overall, these 65,000 Muslims will expend about 302 million dollars on their hajj.

In addition, at least 2.5 million non-pilgrims all over the country will slaughter at least one animal per family. Assuming an average cost of $200 per beast, this nationwide ritual sacrifice will leave Bangladeshis poorer by around 500 million dollars.

In total, the 65,000 pilgrims and 2.5 million non-pilgrim Muslims of Bangladesh will impoverish their country by a staggering sum of around $852 million. This they will do it this year and will continue to do so in future as well to please Allah, even though He does not require them either to perform hajj or to brutally murder millions of innocent and helpless animals. A close reading of Quran's verse 2:196 makes it clear.

It requires Muslims to send their offerings — a word used for sacrificial animals— to Mina near Mecca with other people if illness or hostilities prevent them from reaching the holy city themselves. Allah imposed this condition on Muslims in the 7th century when it was virtually impossible for a Muslim in India, for instance, to send an offering to Mecca.

Even voyaging such a great distance was almost unheard of. So on whom did Allah really impose the requirements of hajj and animal sacrifice?

It was the people of the Arabian Peninsula. [Karen Armstrong enforces our belief by saying: "Muslims believed that Islam was for the Arabs as Judaism was for the sons of Jacob;" in "A History of God," p. 159] They could travel from their homes to Mecca in a few days with other people's animals trotting alongside, attend hajj, slaughter the creatures at Mina, and return home to report compliance with Allah's command to their employers so that the latter could shave their heads — another ritual all male pilgrims to Mecca must carry out after performing their hajj.

Bangladeshis spend a huge amount on hajj every year, and most of this money comes from wage-earners who toil day and night in foreign lands to earn a few hundred dollars a month. This colossal waste occurs despite the fact that a great many people in the northern region of the country, at least once a year, cannot get enough food to feed themselves and their children. It occurs though many farmers lack a pair of oxen to till their lands. It occurs despite foreign aid, a good part of which essentially gets rerouted to finance the hajj rituals of its Muslim populace.

Money spent on hajj could instead go into local economies and make Bangladeshis more affluent. It could give farmers oxen and perhaps tractors, and it could lead to more jobs and feed hungry mouths. It could build infrastructure, thus lowering the cost of economic transactions and accelerating them as well. Over time, it could help Bangladeshis free their country from its perennial poverty and relieve them of the humiliation of handouts.

We have been describing Bangladesh, but the phenomenon is worldwide. Some three million pilgrims travel to Mecca each year, making the city a vast money suck from people and nations that cannot afford it. The total detriment is enormous.

Why hasn't Allah put an end to hajj? Perhaps, He cares more about the Saudis than other Muslims, but if so, why? And why does He want Muslims to waste their money on these trips rather than use it to advance their prosperity, gain power and influence, and encourage the peaceful spread of Islam? The answers remain a mystery to us.

***Oil*:** Allah has played endless tricks on His followers, and one of the cruelest involves oil. He placed massive amounts of it under the territory of many Muslim nations. After the clever Unbelievers invented the internal combustion engine, oil became essential to transportation in their world and eventually its value soared. To nations like Saudi Arabia and Iran, it seemed like a bonanza.

To some extent, it was. But economists have long known about the harmful effects of oil on developing economies. (It does not hurt nations with diversified economies and sound, established governments like the United States and Norway.) Oil-rich nations tend to focus solely on oil, the cash spigot. They thus slight the other industries that could make for a healthy, multifaceted economy. For instance, they don't develop the talent they would need across a wide variety of areas. As the money flows in, they rely on imports. In other words, they take their oil profits and immediately send them back to the Unbelievers to buy the things they need. If they had diversified economies, people could spend a big part of that money within the nation and it would grow much more prosperous and strong.

In addition, oil-rich nations tend to remain dictatorships. Since the government generally controls the flow of oil and makes the profits, it becomes the hub of economic activity instead of the private sector. The result is an invitation to corruption. Payments to people of influence in the government get things done. And corruption is a ticket to under-development. (Islam encourages it and other malignancies, for Muslims who perform hajj properly return to home with all their sins washed away as promised by the Prophet Muhammad [*www.islamoneline.com/news*] — though how could he have made such a dramatic pledge, if he were not Allah, is an enigma.)

Among other things, corruption acts as a tax on transactions, so firms need to make more profit to survive than they would without it. Infrastructure that would cut business costs, such as good highway systems, tends not to get built even when funded, because officials pocket the money allotted for them. Efforts toward democracy wither, because governments tend to spend inordinately on internal police and espionage, and in the Muslim lands they have the example of the Prophet to follow. Oil-rich governments also tend to use handouts and subsidies to relieve pressures toward democracy, and these further discourage entrepreneurial activity.

Japan provides an interesting comparison. This infidel land has virtually no natural resources, and it has prospered enormously because of that. It has developed an export economy, and its products compete successfully at the world-class level.

In comparison, nations Allah has cursed with oil - Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Kuwait - remain remarkably

undeveloped. But oil is hardly the whole story. Allah has also kept many Islamic nations without oil, such as Morocco and Syria, and they too remain far behind. One reason lies in the direct economic hamstrings of the Quran.

***Islamic finance*:** We've seen that Allah was no Galileo. He was no Adam Smith either. He laid down a variety of prohibitions, which have hampered the Muslim economies so much that, if strictly followed, they would rend Islam completely from the modern world and mire it even deeper in poverty. They are so retrograde that Muslims everywhere have found ways around them. They obey the letter of the Quran while flouting its intent.

For instance, the Quran prohibits interest, or *riba*. Yet interest enables lending and lending makes modern economies work. We all saw what happened in the United States when the credit market seized in fall of 2008. The whole economy seemed to halt.

Why is lending so valuable? First, it multiplies wealth. If you put $10 in a bank, you still own that $10. But then a little miracle takes place. The bank lends that $10 to someone else who then also has $10. The amount of money in society has doubled. When there is more money floating around, a nation is richer.

Lending has a second boon: It automatically directs funds toward the most worthy enterprises. Lenders don't lend to anyone. Exceptions like the 2008 mortgage fiasco aside, lenders funnel loans to the people most likely to pay them back, that is, the most deserving, the most competent, and often the most innovative. The result is a system that guides society toward a higher level, without apparent effort.

Interest is the cost of lending. Loans bear risks, and interest should cover these risks. That's why a poor credit risk like a BB-rated company pays higher interest than at triple- A firm. Interest also defrays the effort and expenses in running a bank. So without interest, banks won't lend money. Why would they? They'd be doing volunteer work and they could only lose. And, clearly, they couldn't obtain money to loan in the first place, since depositors come to banks expecting interest.

Muslim scholars disagree about what constitutes forbidden interest. Some say it includes all interest, a prescription for economic suicide. Some say only usury or excess profit counts, and some say that any interest is now acceptable. A few observers have noted that, in certain cases today, loaning money at no interest can be usury. Why? In a world of deflation, where currencies are gaining value relative to goods every year, no interest can amount to a profit, and if the deflation is steep enough, a hefty one. No interest would therefore be usury. Allah does not comment on this possibility. But which of these theories is right? The question remains crucial for Islam, despite the many means of circumvention.

Allah told Muhammad:

"*That which ye lay out for increase through the property of (other) people, will have no increase with Allah: but that which ye lay out for charity, seeking the Countenance of Allah, (will increase): it is these who will get a recompense multiplied.*" [Q 30:39]

"*Those who devour usury will not stand except as stand one whom the Evil one by his touch hath driven to madness. That is because they say: "Trade is like usury," but Allah hath permitted trade and forbidden usury. Those who after receiving direction from their Lord, desist, shall be pardoned for the past; their case is for*

Allah (to judge); but those who repeat (the offence) are companions of the Fire: they will abide therein (for ever)." [Q 2:275]

"*And fear the Day when ye shall be brought back to Allah. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly.*" [Q 2:281]

In an attempt to clarify "riba," Fathi Osman writes:

"Usury or riba in the Quran may encompass any unlawful addition to the principle when such an addition is unfair and thus harmful to the individuals and the society. As Ibn Kathir noticed in his commentary on the verse 2:275, as did other commentators and jurists, riba is one of the most difficult subjects in Islamic law, since the verse prohibiting riba, as well as what the Prophet said about riba in his sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage, came in the last days of the Prophet's life. As a result of this, the Companions had no opportunity to ask him about the matter, so that even Caliph Umar stated a wish that the Prophet could have given some explanations, according to a report by Ibn Hanbal. In general, riba has been related to loans involving an exploitation of the economically weak and needy borrower by the strong and wealthy lender who always gains, whereas the borrower may be merely using the money to fulfill a need of life. …

"What Muhammad Asad (a Jew-turned a Muslim scholar) has clarified is essential, since usury is not a name of a certain concrete material object, but of a dealing between two or more people which can be understood within historical and social circumstances. Linguistic explanation of riba as an 'addition' or an 'increase' cannot shed any light on the matter, since any legitimate incurrence of profit is also an increase. Relating the words 'addition' or 'increase' to a loan in particular may also not be sufficiently convincing, because the circumstances of

the society and the dealer have to be considered, since a loan may have secured mutual free agreement, mutual gain and payments, mutual equitable benefit, social usefulness etc." [*Concept of the Quran: A Tropical Reading*, pp. 879-880]

We draw the following conclusion from this statement as well as from the Quran:

"Riba" denotes excessive or exploitative interest, that is, "usury" in English. Because of its exorbitant nature, usury is a prosecutable offense in the United States. Hence normal interest is not riba. The Quran has not prohibited payment and receipt of legal interest on a loan. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's opinion is identical to ours, for he says:

"The definition I would accept would be: Undue profit made, not in the way of legitimate trade, out of loans of gold and silver, and necessary articles of food, such as wheat, barley, dates and salt (according to the list mentioned by the Holy Apostle himself). My definition would include profiteering of all kinds of, but exclude economic credit, the creature of modern banking and finance."

We surmise that the first two verses were revealed to Muhammad a year or two after he arrived in Medina This means that from the time of their revelation, usury became *haram* or illegal for all Muslims. How effectively Muhammad was able to enforce this prohibition on Jews and the Pagans of Medina remains a hotly contested issue.

Now, let us read what Muhammad is believed to have said on the payment and receipt of riba in his Farewell Sermon, which he delivered eight or nine years after his arrival in Medina:

"I have told you: He, who has a pledge, let him return it to him who entrusted him with it; all usury is abolished, but you have your capital. …"

All Muslim scholars are familiar with this sermon, in which, Ibn Ishaq also reports Muhammad telling his audience: "*…Allah has decreed that there is to be no usury and the usury of 'Abbas b. 'Abdul-Muttalib is abolished, all of it.*" [The Life of Muhammad, p. 651]

A close reading of Muhammad's first statement tells us that he abolished all usury, but permitted the lenders to recover their loaned money from the borrowers. He also required the lenders to return the pledged securities to the borrowers, without making clear whether the lenders were to act upon his order before or after their loans had been returned to them by their debtors.

With the above in mind, let us now consider what the reports suggest Muhammad had told his audience: According to the first quote, he was the first one, and not Allah, to cancel or abolish all usury of his family members. According to the second, Allah decreed the abolishment of usury in general, and that of al-Abbas b. Abdul Mutalib in particular, from the day Muhammad read out His decision. This leads us to conclude:

1. Until the day of Muhammad's announcement, his family members practiced usury. The very force of his declaration helps us reach this conclusion.

2. Muhammad allowed his family members to practice usury, though Allah never lagged in reporting the lenders' and borrowers' activities to him. Allah personally spied on the common people of Medina [Q 58:7] as well as on his family members, [Q 66:3] lest they secretly do or say anything against

his dictums. But He appears to have turned a blind eye to the money lending activities of Muhammad's family members, as they belonged to a club of elite people!

3. Muhammad violated the Quran by allowing his family members to practice usury.

Now, could a violator of Allah's precepts be a prophet, and come to earth to instruct humanity about those very precepts?

Allah knew all along that interest would make Believers richer, more comfortable, and more powerful. He knew that it would help spur their overall economies, and that perhaps it might have kept Muslim nations from falling prey to loan-savvy European nations in the 19th and 20th centuries. But through the ambiguity of *riba*, He put roadblocks in the way of Muslims' use of interest, just as He would have, if He preferred to see them poor.

The Quran also prohibits speculation, and thus stock markets, options trading, futures markets, and much of the apparatus of modern finance. The forbidden element is *gharar* ("danger"), that is, uncertainty about the price of the goods or the subject matter of a contract — essentially, any speculative risk. Stock markets provide an invaluable service in raising money for companies. They buoy and reward successful firms and help weed out inept ones. They also enable many citizens to own portions of corporations and to benefit from growth in prosperity. But since they are unpredictable, Allah forbids investment in them. Why would Allah impose such a condition on Muslims? It's tempting to say that Allah knew no more than Muhammad did about stock markets — that is, nothing — but that would be incorrect, since the Quran itself tells us that Allah knows everything.

Finally, Islam forbids insurance, as a form of speculation. It involves outcomes that one cannot know. Insurance is ancient and it enables ventures that have some risk in them, such as the overseas sailing voyages that helped enrich Europe. Without insurance, people take fewer such risks and trade shrinks. On a more local level, without car or health insurance in our modern world, a single unexpected event can cause catastrophe to individuals. Insurance can prevent such disasters, but it shouldn't, since all such sufferings are the Will of Allah. It is unclear why Allah let infidels create insurance in the first place!

Again, Muslims have found numerous ways around these pre-capitalist edicts. They have evolved looser interpretations and an impressive array of contortion instruments. But their existence has hampered Muslim economies for centuries. Why has Allah made Muslims so poor? Perhaps the answer lies in the Quran itself:

"*So he went forth among his people in the (pride of his worldly) glitter, said those whose aim is the Life of this World: "Oh! That we had the like of what Qarun has got! For he is truly a lord of mighty good fortune*." [The Quran, 28:79]

"*But those who had been granted (true) knowledge said: "Alas for you! The reward of Allah (in the Hereafter) is best for those who believe and work righteousness: But this none shall attain, save those who steadfastly preserve the good*."" [Quran, 28:70]

Clearly, the reward of the hereafter is more precious to Muslims than the gaudy prizes of this ephemeral world. So why bother to work hard to accumulate a wealth that will not last and forego the bliss of the Gardens?

The likes of Warren Buffet and Bill Gates have little place in Islam, their philanthropic and charities notwithstanding.

Democracy or Allahcracy

Muhammad was a classic, if primitive dictator. He shared power with no one and required absolute deference. His decisions governed all aspects of people's lives, yet were beyond appeal. His network of spies anticipated Stalin's and he brought out Allah to justify it. If he had the means, we suspect he would have applied genuine torture to dissenters rather than the mere threat of it in the afterlife.

After the Renaissance in Europe, monarchs developed the notion of the "divine right of kings," whereby God sanctioned their arbitrary rule. Muhammad used a much more potent device: He convinced people that he was Allah's messenger. All his decisions were correct, since they weren't really his decisions at all, but those of a creator of the universe who demanded obedience. The governed were the governed, and any sense that they might have a say in Muhammad's rulings was preposterous. The very meaning of "Islam" — "submission"— notified Muslims of their proper role in Muhammad's scheme. If they submitted, they gained a wondrous reward after death, one impossible to prove, but solemnly promised by a Prophet who grew rich and powerful from their submission. We are not told if there is democracy in the Gardens, but since it is Allah's place of residence, democracy seems impossible.

After Muhammad's death in 632 A.D., the pattern continued. Not a single Caliph of Islam was elected. With their absolute power they set up hereditary dynasties and ruled an empire that once stretched from India to the Atlantic Ocean. The common people had little say in the government affairs. They had to submit to their leaders without asking questions or making suggestions.

Today, most Muslim nations remain dictatorships. For instance:

– India and Pakistan split into two independent countries in 1947. India, a Hindu country, is a democracy, and its armed forces have played almost no role in its governance. But Pakistan, a Muslim country, has suffered regular military coups, and generals have ruled it for the better part of its existence.

– Moammar Gaddafi, an Army colonel, has been ruling Libya for over 35 years.

– Hafez Al-Asaad, a former Air Force commander, ruled Syria for 30 years. After his death in 2000, his son Bashar succeeded him. He is still the President of the country and is likely remain so for an indefinite period of time.

– Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq for over 30 years until the United States invaded and ousted him in 2003.

– General Suharto kept Indonesians under his thumb for over 30 years.

– Hosni Mubarak has occupied Egypt's Presidential Palace for over 24 years. He is now grooming his son to become his successor.

Of course, the prerequisites for democracy are complex and one cannot simply will it into existence. It requires a certain level of general wealth, an educated middle class, or it tends to revert quickly to absolutism. And though many Middle Eastern nations have vast oil reservoirs, most Petro-states are sick, with bloated economies. Democracy also requires honesty, true accountability to the public. Mexico long feigned popular elections, but did not achieve them until recently, partly because of its inbred corruption. If officials will steal

from the public, they will usually lie about its voting preferences as well. (One interesting exception is India, a pervasively corrupt state except in its elections.) Many other factors — freedom of speech, women's rights, property rights, literacy, education — feed into the appearance of democracy as well.

Religion matters too. Democracy came later to southern Europe — Spain, Portugal, Italy— than northern Europe partly because of the hostility of the Catholic Church. And in the Islamic world, democracy is most solid in Turkey, the only Muslim country to ban Islam from its legal system.

Certainly Turkey had other advantages. No one ever colonized it (though no one colonized Saudi Arabia either). Turkey had long cultural contacts with Europe. It lacked oil and in its absence the economy prospered and diversified, and the overall standard of living rose significantly. It developed modern attitudes toward economic growth and the policies that foster it. And it enjoyed the fortune of having a great reformer, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Ataturk modernized Turkey in many ways, and one of his significant steps disenfranchised Islam. In a series of moves, he voided Sharia and replaced it with more modern civil and criminal codes of law. Most other Islamic states embody some degree of Islam in their constitutions, but not Turkey. Ataturk wrested control of the law from the long-dead hands of Muhammad.

Why does it matter?

Islam is structurally and legally hostile to democracy. First, it has the command structure of a monarchy. We read of Allah's total power again and again in the Quran:

24:42: *The dominion of the heavens and the earth belong to Allah alone*.

28:88: *Sovereignty belongs to Allah; there is no Allah but Him*.

34:1: *Allah is the sole owner of whatsoever in the heavens and on earth*.

57:5: *Allah has the supreme authority on the heavens and the earth*.

This top-down model of governance replicates dictatorships the world has seen everywhere. And we human beings are remarkably responsive to patterns. We recognize them, fill them out, and live our lives amid patterns whose influence on our thinking we may not always be able to grasp. Our ability to work with patterns is a basic part of our intelligence, but it can mislead us too. And in the case of Islam, reverence for the theological pattern easily shifts to reverence for its political analogue.

Islam also contains laws from the very mouth of Allah. Hence, one scholar says, "For Islam, democracy poses a formidable challenge. Muslim jurists argued that law made by a sovereign monarch is illegitimate because it substitutes human authority for God's sovereignty. But law made by sovereign citizens faces the same problem of legitimacy. In Islam, God is the only sovereign and ultimate source of legitimate law. How, then, can a democratic conception of the people's authority be reconciled with an Islamic understanding of God's authority?" [Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Challenge of Democracy," *Boston Review*,]

The 1400-year-old contents of the Quran are the infallible words of Allah, so Muslims must choose its laws over those drawn up by humans. Yet, unfortunately, no matter how hard

they try, people can never make laws as perfect as Allah's. So some Muslim shun man-made constitutions and democracy. They yearn for a world run by Sharia laws, themselves— ironically — often manmade, formulated by the four Muslim Imams over 1300 years ago on the basis of the Quran and the Sunnah (practices) of Muhammad.

Hence the cleric Abu Bakar Bashir, the leader of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council, has attacked elections: "It is not democracy that we want, but Allah-cracy." [Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Dispatch Series, no. 1285, Sept. 8, 2006] The situation might be similar in the United States if a significant political party urged return to the canon law, and only the canon law, of early medieval England.

Beyond the matter of sovereignty, the Quran is plainly anti-democratic. It violently opposes modern liberties such as freedom of thought. Allah hates disbelief more than any other sin, and its expression— that is, "freedom of speech" and "freedom of religion"—was intolerable to the apparently threatened Deity. That is why He has said that no religion is acceptable to Him other than Islam. [Q 3:85]

Islam also denies equal status to women, much as the original U.S. Constitution did to both slaves and women. But the Constitution let people modify it, and they have. It is not the eternal, immutable word of Allah. Human laws possess that enormous virtue: Imperfection. People know they can and should change with circumstances. No one pretends they are forever ideal.

Many commentators have discussed the possibility of "Islamic democracy." It would resemble "Islamic science"; that is, it would be a domain limited by Islam. But "Islamic science" makes no sense. There is just science. We have only

the world around us. Democracy, though, comes in degrees. So we can at least imagine Islamic democracy. But it bears little relationship to democracy as most people understand it, as a means by which people can freely choose their leaders at the ballot box, correct government abuses and failures, and guarantee themselves basic rights and liberties.

Iran is one example of Islamic democracy. Iranians certainly vote. But the Ayatollahs must approve all candidates. And despite their elections, these officials can be overridden at any time by the religious authorities, who form a parallel, unelected government at every level. This is a "democracy" that does not reflect the national will — and indeed the Ayatollahs are so unpopular and weak that people commonly flout their instructions. The young often disdain the dress code and, as journalist Robin Wright observes, "Many of [supreme Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei's other fatwas are also ignored. Satellite dishes beam in CNN and BBC, which are viewed even in government offices. Women ride on the back of motorcycles, their chadors flapping dangerously in the wind. And the double bill at the local movie house the same weekend as the commemoration of the American embassy takeover in 2004 featured *Kill Bill* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. They played to sold-out audiences. Despite its theme of religious irreverence, *Bruce Almighty* drew big audiences a few months later." [Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East*, New York, Penguin, 2008, p. 294]

Why did the Ayatollahs bother creating a "democracy" at all? One reason is that democracies have shown immense strength throughout the 20th century, winning both World Wars and dominating the planet economically. But the more important reason is moral. Democracy is fair and autocracy

isn't, and this case is overwhelming. La Rochefoucauld said, "Hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue," and the Ayatollahs are paying it with their sham democracy.

Listen to Iran's ex-President Mohammad Khatami, in an interview before a presidential election: "The existing democracies do not necessarily follow one formula or aspect. It is possible that a democracy may lead to a liberal system. It is possible that democracy may lead to a socialist system. Or it may be a democracy with the inclusion of religious norms in the government. We have accepted the third option." [In John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, "Islam and Democracy," *Humanities*, Nov/Dec 2001, vol. 22, no. 6] This statement is a mask. Democracy did not "lead to" the Iranian system, as everyone knows. [There was an election to choose drafters of the constitution, but pro-Westerners foolishly boycotted it, leaving the minority clergy free to devise the theocracy we see today.] But let us suppose it did. If so, Iran has ceased being a democracy and its system thus does not qualify as a "formula or aspect" of it.

Some Believers put forth an even emptier rationale for Islamic state supremacy: "In [their] worldview, the separation of religion from politics creates a spiritual vacuum in the public arena and opens the way for political systems that have no sense of moral values. From such a perspective, a secular state opens the way for the abuse of power.

The experiences of Muslim societies with military regimes that are secularist in ideological origin, such as the Baath Arab Socialist regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, reinforce this mistrust of separating religious values from politics." They are attacking a strawman, since not all secular states are dictatorships. Secular democracies like France offer the best

means anyone has yet discovered for correcting abuses of power and assuring moral conduct in office, and we do not understand why Allah has not revealed this fact to Muslims.

But maybe He has. Maybe the evidence is all around Muslims and they have simply refused to see it. Maybe the prosperity of the Unbelievers and the poverty of the Faithful is a wake-up call from the Gardens.

What If Muhammad Had Never Heard of Jews?

In the 2004 film *A Day without a Mexican*, every Latino suddenly disappears from California. The remaining residents quickly realize how much they had depended on Latinos for tasks ranging from landscaping to car washing — and how much they had taken them for granted. Though some citizens had been hostile to them, everyone benefited from them.

No one could make a movie called *Islam without Jews*. Or rather, one could, but it would very much look like Paganism plus Muhammad's own self-interest. Islam owes its identity to Jews. Indeed, it has many debts to them.

***The debt of belief structure*:** Jews gave Muhammad his religion. The thunder of Allah is an echo of Yahweh. The entire framework — the all-powerful single Allah, His combination of wrath and supposed love and mercy, His incessant demands for obedience when He could compel it in a flash, His purported absence of human features, the glorious rewards of the afterlife, the eternal torture of Hell, and so much else — came from Jews, from Abraham and Moses down through Jesus. Muhammad brought the ancient creed of Judea down the Arabian Peninsula, rousted the little panoply of deities from the Kaba, and there installed his own fusion of Judaism and Paganism.

We have seen how Muhammad acquired this debt. His caravan travels took him to ancient Jewish lands and introduced him to the monotheistic hermit Bahira. But there were also plenty of Jews around him. Khadija's cousin, Waraqa ibn Nofal, was a Jew and later a Christian, and gave Muhammad extensive instruction in the Jewish religion. Waraqa also enlisted the aid of the monk Adas who, like him, imparted Muhammad lessons on Judaism and its varied precepts.

This debt was so obvious to others that Muhammad could not hide it, so he acknowledged men like Abraham as one of the prior prophets. At the same time, under instructions from Allah, he derogated them. Allah himself ridicules Jews and Christians for believing in their Scriptures, which He revealed to them but which, He says, were incomplete and which, their forefathers had corrupted and interpolated. However, the Quran makes this charge without producing the original, uncorrupted texts of the Torah and Bible. It simply asserts that those who wish to enter Paradise must believe this allegation. Having so stipulated, the Quran demands that Jews and Christians convert, and urges Muslims to shun their company — and, if necessary, to slay them, since Allah despises them for their embrace of a distorted faith. And since vigorous advocates like Jesus and Moses would probably not have converted, we can assume Muslims would have put them to the sword. Indeed, the holy book repeatedly exhorts Muslims to erase Unbelievers from the face of the earth, so that they can become its sole owner. [Q 9:3-5]

On this score, the People of the Book did indeed misinterpret the Will of the Almighty, for the Bible does not order the faithful to fight and give conquered nonbelievers the

choice of submission or death. Since this edict radically alters the nature of a religion, it's hard to imagine how the early prophets or scribes could have ignored it. Yet it's equally hard to imagine them vetoing Allah. But they must have done one or the other.

Why would Allah be so furious at these people for following a roughly accurate and partial text when they had no idea of its errors? Perhaps it was a test of some kind, since the All-powerful Allah could have prevented the slightest error from entering the prior holy books, as He has with the Quran. We assume that Allah was also irate because they refused to recognize Muhammad as a new prophet. Yet He never gave them any reason to abandon beliefs they thought came from Him. For instance, He might have corrected Jews' own astronomical errors or otherwise issued revelations that later evidence would confirm, but He never did.

And is the Quran guilty of the very corruption it accuses other religions of?

First, let's ask: Is it complete? Suppose Muhammad had died at 45. The Quran would be unfinished, since it would lack the later, bloodier Suras. In others words, Allah would have to send down yet another prophet to complete His revelations. For us to infer that the Quran is complete, we have to believe that Allah had delivered every revelation He had just before Muhammad died. In other word, if Muhammad had continued to live, he would have had no more revelations coming to him from Allah. But given their value to him and their uninterrupted stream right up to his death, we guess they would have continued. So the Quran is too short.

Second: Is the Quran accurate? That is, does it embody without distortion the revelations Allah had sent down from

Paradise? Muhammad tells us that he speaks without distortion, yet he didn't assemble the Quran. To believe that it mirrors Muhammad's words, we have to believe that collectors of the Quran located every word on every leaf and bone, a near-impossible task. We have to believe that no one slipped in a counterfeit leaf or stone, despite the human urge to influence the world. We have to believe that the collectors copied all revelations with absolutely no errors, though no copiers in history have been that accurate. And we have to believe that every copied word found its way into the final, but defective, version overseen by Othman. But we know that many Muslims — some of whom knew Muhammad — opposed Othman's Quran, believing it omitted critical passages. Even today, the Shias believe some 15,000 verses are missing from it. These difficulties suggest that Islam may need a reviser, a new prophet to remove the anomalies the Quran suffers from.

There are further problems, which a new prophet might solve. As we've seen, many passages contradict each other, and some flout scientific knowledge about the universe. The Quran is often obscure and it fails to address a spectrum of issues, so the Hadith arose. Who will resolve its contradictions? Who will rectify its errors? Who will clarify its ambiguity? Who will address the matters it has neglected? And who will free imprisoned women for commission of lewdness? [Cf. Q 4:15. It says, "Confine them to houses until death do claim them, or Allah ordain some other way."]

We contend that, just as the Quran was wrong about the sun never overtaking the moon, it was wrong about Muhammad being the final prophet. The sacred Islamic text is

corrupt, and perhaps a later prophet or apostle appeared to correct it, but failed due to the stiff opposition of Muslims.

Muhammad claims to be the last prophet but not the last apostle of Allah. Hence many further apostles may have arrived and they may still be arriving to help Muslims live in its changed conditions. In fact, given our radically different world, it is hard to imagine that they haven't. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, may have been an apostle. Mirza Gulam Ahmad of Qadian, the founder of Ahmadiya Islam, may have been another. If Muslims grasp this Quranic truth, they may become a better people and our world may be a safer, more peaceful place for everyone to live in.

However, we do not know for sure of such apostles — and certainly Muslims might have slain some of these blasphemers if they had appeared. Yet if Allah hates Jews for following a corrupted text, He must hate Muslims with equal force. His desire to punish them may explain the general poverty and other rampant ills of the Islamic nations today. Islam also differs from Judaism in its method of revelation. Judaism arose over centuries, in a long series of contributions. Christians recognize the teachings of both Jesus and Paul as scripture and include them in the New Testament. And our knowledge of Jesus comes secondhand, through the recollections in the Gospels. As a result, it was harder in both religions for revelations that might have solved one person's day-to-day problems to become accepted as eternal laws.

But in the Quran, Muhammad speaks as the sole funnel from Allah. The theology of Jews drifted down to him in revelations adapted to his needs, and he proclaimed them. The Islam of the Quran came from one person — a dictator, a

robber, a child molester, and a mass murderer— and it accommodated all his desires.

Overall, Muhammad's response to Judaism resembles that of a man resentful of his moral debt. When you have borrowed extensively, the lender may become a threat. Certain people abuse their benefactors, as if they can thereby erase their obligation. And Muhammad also needed to distinguish himself from Jews, for if they were correct, the world had no need of him. And to whatever extent they were correct, his importance dwindled. So Muhammad both built on Judaism and sought to destroy it. And, as we've seen, he had another reason for opposing Jews.

***The debt of funding*:** Poverty afflicted him for most of his life. If he had not been poor, he might have been less avaricious. But Jews had money. Through their hard work, they had over time accumulated possessions enviable to the Prophet who had contributed virtually nothing to the economy in Mecca and had run through his wife's fortune there. And since they were a relatively easy target in Medina, he seized their wealth. Without it, he might never have conquered Mecca, and if he hadn't conquered Mecca, Islam might have remained a local creed or vanished from the earth. So Jews contributed significantly to Muhammad's military career. And Muhammad developed rationales for seizing their property, which appear in the Quran itself.

In Medina, Jews' initial difficulties with Muhammad developed after they had refused to employ the unskilled and unproductive Muslims from Mecca. Their situation took a serious turn when they refused to give generous alms to the Muslim beggars, despite his appeal to give "beautiful loans to Allah." Muhammad tolerated Jews' unhelpful attitude

towards him and his followers with much difficulty, as he had not yet acquired the strength— in arms and manpower — to retaliate.

Of course, Jews added salt to Muhammad's self-inflicted wound by refusing to accept him as a Prophet of Allah and by disputing and ridiculing his preachings— preachings in which he denied many of their age-old precepts and sought to place himself at the center of their universe. Hurt by their condescension, he tolerated them until his success against the Meccan Pagans at the Battle of Badr.

This victory laid the true foundation stone of Islam. As we have stated earlier, Muhammad's success here boosted his and his followers' morale tremendously and gave them much confidence in his military leadership. But it also sent a message to the Medinese Jews that he had become a powerful leader and that they would find it prudent to do exactly as he wished them to. Jews ignored the omens, no doubt believing Muhammad to be a better man than he was, and ultimately paid a high price for overestimating his virtue.

As we've noted earlier, verse 9:29 describes Muhammad's policy for dealing with conquered non-believers, including Jews: Convert, pay *jizyah*, or die. Yet after Badr, Jews tried to appease the angry Prophet by paying him, and he refused. In contravention of Allah's wishes revealed later, he wanted everything they owned.

As a matter of principle, of course, there are serious contradictions between the edicts for *jizyah* and for total confiscation. But as a matter of pragmatism, they disappear. Muhammad could loot the wealth of Jews and banish them without catastrophic consequences. But he couldn't do the same with a conquered people. If Muslims had taken all the

Meccans' property when they overran the holy city, its economy would have shriveled and its angry citizens revolted. Looting destroys the source of wealth, but the *jizyah* milked it and enabled ongoing plunder. Allah understood when looting was counterproductive and when it was not, and hence no doubt nodded when His Prophet seized the worldly goods of the Medinese Jews.

***The debt of breath*:** Muhammad took not just the Jews' religion and property. He took their lives. In an unnerving prequel to the pogroms of the Middle Ages and the Holocaust of World War II, he slaughtered 600-700 helpless Jews in one day. One would think this act would evoke astonishment and outrage. After all, it is hard to imagine Jesus or Gautama Buddha committing mass murder. But historians tend to glide over it and one of the best known, Karen Armstrong, dismisses it as equivalent to the deeds of other chieftains of the time. Yet if customs were morality, slavery would still be moral.

Moreover, no other chieftain of the time murdered people on the scale of the Prophet of Islam. And most importantly, none of them had ongoing access to Allah. Why didn't Allah intervene to stop the killing with a revelation? He addressed far more trivial moral issues, such as when people should doff their clothes. [Q 24:58]This issue mattered to the Most Merciful, yet the pogrom did not.

In consequence of the Quranic teachings, hatred and intolerance toward other religions remain a cornerstone of the Islamic faith. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia follows the Quranic injunction in letters and spirit; it allows its people to believe or practice no religion but Islam. Diehard Muslims elsewhere do not hesitate to put the Quran's hateful teachings

to practical use, whenever opportunity occurs. At the same time, scorning Allah's prohibitions on hypocrisy, they proclaim their religion to be one of universal peace and harmony!

The anti-Semitism of the Quran finds primary expression today in the hatred of Israel. We will not enter into the complex, acid argument about it here, except to note that the Israelis clearly took Palestinian land, which Allah had earlier given Jews after they came out of Egypt. [Q 26:60 and 28:5-6. Also see Yusuf Ali's note no. 3330 to verse 28:5. According to him, "Here [i.e. Palestine] they were established in authority for such time as they followed Allah's Law"] Yet removing them now would entail terrible bloodshed. Any lasting solution will almost certainly require compromise, and none is in sight.

The Quran will make any compromise harder to achieve. Its aggressive Suras worsen the animosity against Israel. It is explicit about Jews, as we have seen. Bitter feuds can end, as they did in Northern Ireland, for instance. But the Bible contains no commands to subjugate the Protestants, and if it did, the conflict might still be going on, with a very different tone.

Most conspicuously, the problem today lies in the Muslim threats to extirpate Israel. Powerful individuals like Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have indicated that they want to wipe Israel off the map, and Iran at least has been developing the capacity for a nuclear bomb. The slaughter of those 600-700 Jews provides a divinely ordained precedent, for if Muhammad could do it, why not Ahmadinejad?

Of course, since Israel also has an atomic bomb, and has it for a long time, the danger to Muslims is obvious. Turn Tel

Aviv into the new Hiroshima, and who knows how many large Muslim cities will also become infernos?

Truly committed Believers may think that Allah will safeguard them from harm. If so, they should ask where Allah was when the Mongol hordes razed Baghdad, or the Crusaders occupied Palestine, or the British made Egypt a semi-colony, or Muslims themselves burned down His House, the Kaba, to the ground? When the devout have been in peril, Allah has often been AWOL.

Overall, Muhammad's relation to Jews was the same as a man who gains fame by plagiarizing another, stealing his goods, and murdering his kin — and then calls his victim a scoundrel!

Jihad: From Badr to the World Trade Center

What was Mohammad Atta thinking at the moment his plane crashed into the World Trade Center?

We obviously can't know. But he may have been praying to Allah, perhaps repeating verses from the Quran. He may have been thinking about Muhammad's slaughter of Jews and about how he was obeying Allah's jihadist command to kill the Unbelievers. He may have been imagining the imminent delights of the Gardens, with their rivers of clarified honey, the 72 eager Hurs who would engulf him, and the glad greeting from Muhammad himself!

For 9/11 would not have happened without the Quran.

Though we can't know Atta's final thoughts, we do know the thoughts of other suicide bombers. They involve a sense of justice and honor, but Islam wraps it up in a glowing package and provides the magic incentives.

Here is how one suicide bomber, who somehow survived, described his mentality in the days before the attack: "The power of the spirit pulls us upward, while the power of material things pulls us downward. Someone bent on martyrdom becomes immune to the material pull. Our planner asked, 'What if the operation fails?' We told him, 'In any case, we get to meet the Prophet and his companions, *inshallah*.' We were floating, swimming, in the feeling that we were about to enter eternity. We had no doubts. We made an oath on the Quran, in the presence of Allah — a pledge not to waver. This jihad pledge is called *bayt al ridwan*, after the garden in Paradise that is reserved for the prophets and the martyrs. I know that there are other ways to do jihad. But this one is sweet — the sweetest. All martyrdom operations, if done for Allah's sake, hurt less than a gnat's bite!"

The young jihadi added: *"It's as if a very high, impenetrable wall separated you from Paradise or Hell. Allah has promised one or the other to his creatures. So, by pressing the detonator, you can immediately open the door to Paradise — it is the shortest path to Heaven."* [Nasra Hassan, *"An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to the 'Human Bombs,'"* New York Review of Books, Nov. 19, 2001]

Subtract the Quran from this story — or simply subtract its worst passages — and it deflates. Press the detonator and you just die. It's the shortest path to nothingness. An internal Pentagon briefing described the typical suicide-bomber's motivations similarly: "His actions provide a win-win scenario for himself, his family, his faith and his God. The bomber secures salvation and the pleasures of Paradise. He earns a degree of financial security and a place for his family in Paradise. He defends his faith and takes his place in a long line of martyrs to be memorialized as a valorous fighter. And

finally, because of the manner of his death, he is assured that he will find favor with Allah.

Against these considerations, the selfless sacrifice by the individual Muslim to destroy Islam's enemies becomes a suitable, feasible and acceptable course of action." [Quoted in "Suicide Bombers Follow Quran," *World Net Daily*, Sept 27, 2006] There have been other suicide bombers in history, but they have all either attacked other armies, like the Japanese kamikaze pilots, or assassinated political figures, like the woman who killed Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Islam began the suicide attacks on innocent civilians that led to 9/11.

Authorizations for suicide bombing occur throughout the Quran, most notably in the directive to kill the Unbelievers, but it never specifically mentions the tactic. Why not? Muhammad didn't know it was possible. He had never heard of explosives. In his time, people fought, among others, with swords, and you can't commit suicidal mass murder with a cutlass. We do not know why Allah never told Muhammad about gunpowder!

We also don't know why Allah never whispered a word to Muhammad about automatic weapons, missiles, predator drones, hydrogen bombs --the whole fantastic panoply of modern destruction. Allah clearly knew of them and we have to wonder why, if he truly wanted Muslims to conquer the world, He didn't let the Prophet in on them. If He had, the planet would have been Islamic centuries ago. There would have been no need for 9/11.

We also have to wonder why suicide bombing isn't working. As a military device, it has been remarkably counterproductive. It achieves just the opposite of what the suicide bombers intend. After 9/11, the Americans evicted the

Taliban from Afghanistan, sent al- Qaeda into hiding, and captured or killed many of its operatives. Instead of growing, al-Qaeda has shrunk and now mainly attacks local targets in Pakistan, to the ire of Muslims there. The result in Israel has been similar. It has responded to suicide attacks by electing hard-line governments, assassinating Palestinian leaders, and at times banning innocent Palestinian workers from crossing into Israel to their jobs. Instead of improving the Palestinians' condition, these criminals have worsened it.

Suicide bombs have never won a war and, because they destroy innocent lives, they have incurred worldwide wrath and disgust. As Muhammad welcomes more and more mass murderers in the Gardens, he looks down to earth and sees the pointless bloodshed and the escalated suffering of Muslims themselves. We know he is happy about it, since martyrs continue to receive his blessing and a reward of eternal bliss.

But wait. Is it possible that Allah objected to 9/11? Does He find the bombings as repugnant as most of the world does? Do these killers wind up in Hell, right next to saintlike people who have committed the single sin of not believing in Him?

We doubt it. Muhammad spread Islam through terror and coercion, and the slaughter of Jews sent a message of fear to everyone in the area. Allah himself was a terrorist, as we see in the Quran: "Of a truth ye are stronger (than they) because of the terror in their hearts, (sent) by Allah. This is because they are men devoid of understanding." [Quran, 59:13] So why should Muslims not terrorize non-Muslims?

And they did, starting with Mecca. When Muhammad conquered this city, the leading Quraish converted. It could have been one of those coincidences that occur in history, such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams dying on the same day.

After their long resistance to Muhammad, they all could have seen the superiority of Islam and embraced the glory of the vision, on the very day Muhammad marched in with his army.

But we don't think so. We think they converted because of the "terror in their hearts."

From his flight to Medina in 622 A.D. through his death in 632 A.D., Muhammad is said to have launched 65 expeditions against Jews and the Pagans. These raids, especially his capture of Mecca, spread fear to the far corners of Arabia. Envoys from distant tribes poured into Medina, some acknowledging him as a Prophet and embracing Islam, others submitting to him as a temporal sovereign and agreeing to pay tribute in lieu of conversion or death.

Many important events occur without receiving much notice at the time. We realize the importance of butterfly effects only after they have changed our lives or the course of history. Such an event took place in a remote part of the earth some 1400 years ago, but the whole world is still feeling the consequences.

It is the Battle of Badr. If Muslims had lost it, they would likely have lost confidence in Muhammad as a military leader and been more reluctant to follow him into battle. They would have wondered why the galloping host of angels never appeared and hence whether any of Muhammad's promises were true. If they then went into the Battle of Uhud and lost again, they would have found their doubts confirmed. Muhammad in turn would have lacked the power to seize the wealth of the Medinese Jews. The Quran would never have appeared and the twin towers would still cast their shadows on lower Manhattan of New York!

Badr also helped make Muhammad a tyrant. The Muhammad of Mecca who preached relatively peaceful doctrines and seemed to want to improve the lot of people in Mecca and its neighborhood. Believing strongly that the Day of Judgment was near, he implored his fellow Meccans "to serve the Lord of their City" — that is, Mecca — and to be kind to orphans and the poor in order to earn salvation.

After his migration to Medina, this ostensibly pacific man became a relentless schemer and warrior, bent on plunder and determined to spread his religion by the sword, with an ultimate goal of founding a state only for his followers. The Battle of Badr consolidated his power and afterwards this man who had lived with one wife for almost 24 years gained the power to assemble a huge harem and be a sadistic womanizer.

We human beings undergo constant change, but we tend not to notice these changes unless some event calls them to our attention. Hence people over 50 often imagine they are the same as they were in their twenties or thirties— until, say, they break a bone from a simple fall. At the same time, their experiences bring about mental maturity. They become more cautious, practical beings who can analyze events from angles that younger ones have not yet grasped.

These observations do not fully apply to Muhammad, for he defied many natural human developments to achieve his unnatural goals. At 53, he emerged in Medina as a man whose physical and emotional faculties, instead of waning, became energized. A new person appeared. The man who had preached compassion in Mecca was now intent on humiliating, killing, and conquering his own kith and kin, since they had ridiculed him for years. He abandoned his humane persona and, donning the armor of a brutal warrior,

brought the entire population of Arabia to its knees. He became a jihadist. It took him ten years to realize this dream. That decade was full of intrigues, manipulations, accusations, and violence coupled with plunder and murder. Muhammad justified it all by keeping Allah on his side. Allah assured the world that his crimes were moral, his killings benign, and his lechery divine. Allah told his followers to die for him, and they did. They still do.

The Quran arose partly to justify jihad. As a result of it, a man like Osama bin Laden could leave his home, family, business, and wealth in Saudi Arabia and travel to Afghanistan to fight the infidels, the enemies of His Apostle. Flinging his affluence away, he chose a life of deprivation solely to increase the pleasure of Allah — a course of action that will win him a place in the Gardens where he will live forever in Allah's company, with unimaginable treats arriving at his merest whim. Here he will have *"young women whose breasts are firm and well-shaped and all of equal age"* [Quran, 78:33] to satisfy his sexual fantasies. Should he become fed up with them, he can call in *"[drunken] youths of perpetual freshness and looking like scattered pearls"* to quench his lust. [Old women with flat breasts had no value to Arab men. Muhammad exchanged a woman for six camels as *"her mouth was cold, her breasts flat; she could not conceive and her husband would not care and her milk was not rich"* (Ibn Ishaq, *op. cit.*, p. 593)]

Such are the enticements that turn even intelligent Muslims into jihadists. Once overtaken by them, earthly joys pale and rarely lure them back from the path of jihad. This is the naked truth about Islam. Some Muslims insist that the Quran does not mandate jihad. But its very words belie them. [For a more

extended analysis, see author's *"Jihad Is an Integral Part of Islam"*]:

4:75: "*And why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee one who will protect; and raise for us from Thee one who will help!'*"

The verse attempts to rouse that ancient, potent justification for violence: Self-defense. It says, essentially: We are weak, vulnerable, and abused, so fight to stop the injustice. It explicitly mentions two causes: 1) to protect the oppressed, clearly a decent goal, and 2) to advance "the cause of Allah," synonymous with the cause of Muhammad throughout the Quran, but here undefined. The following verses shed light on it:

4:76: "*Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who reject Faith fight in the cause of Evil: So fight ye against the friends of Satan: Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan*."

In the sight of Allah, Unbelievers are evil, the "friends of Satan." Fighting them, and bringing them into the fold of Islam, is thus good by definition. Thus, all Muslims bear this responsibility. We are unclear how the feeble cunning of Satan could have stymied Allah for so many centuries!

Allah said:

4:100: "*He who forsakes his home in the cause of Allah finds in the earth many refuges, wide and spacious: Should he die as a refuge from home for Allah and His Apostle, his reward becomes due and sure with Allah: And Allah is oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful*."

This verse attempts to allay fears about departing into unknown territory for war. It tells anxious citizens that those

who leave home in jihad find excellent refuges on earth and earn guaranteed rewards from the Supreme Being.

Allah continued:

9:41: "*Go ye forth (whether equipped) lightly or heavily, and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the cause of Allah. That is best for you, if ye (but) knew*."

"Striving" (*jihadu* in Arabic) means fighting against Unbelievers "in the cause of Allah." These individuals deserve suppression and ultimately elimination from the face of Allah's earth. Forget the hazards of war, for Allah knows it is in your own self-interest.

Allah went on saying:

66:9: "*O Prophet! Strive hard against the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell,- an evil refuge (indeed)*."

47:4: "*Therefore, when y meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): Thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): But it is had been Allah's Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the way of Allah, - He will never let their deeds be lost.*"

Verse 66:9 lays bare the essence of "jihadu." Through it, Allah asked Muhammad to wage war upon the Unbelievers and hypocrites. Through verse 47:4, Allah clearly and openly sanctions killing of the Unbelievers, since murder is a fleabite next to eternal agony in Hell.

Of course, jihad was one thing when men rode into battle on camels and it is another thing in the modern world. At

some point, Muslim fundamentalists will almost certainly gain control of atomic weapons, and suicide bombers will go nuclear. Where is the cutoff line, after all, between blowing up 50 people in a mosque and blowing up a city? And these "martyrs," from the heads of state on down, won't fear annihilation because it is "the shortest path to heaven." Imagine what would happen, if al-Qaeda had nuclear bombs right now!

Muslims will draw inspiration for jihad from the Quran as long as they read it. The only way to lift Muslims above the Quran is to minimize it, to show them the truth — the fallacies, local self-interest, and atavism — of this manual of hate and violence, and perhaps even take it away. Its institutionalized derogation will help create a new generation of Muslims, who will not find inspiration in the bloodthirsty messages Muhammad meant for his time, but which the present generation acts upon today.

These future generations, without respect for the Quran, will differ greatly from Muslims of our time. Free from the Quran-inspired violence and ill will towards the followers of other religions, they will go about their business like normal, civilized humans. Their interaction with others will be free from the bigotry that afflicts a sizable number of the present-day Muslims, and they will better be able to live with people of other religions in peace and mutual pleasantness.

We believe there is no better way to bring about an effective, qualitative change in the perceptions and attitudes of the future Muslim generations. And we believe that, otherwise, it will not be possible to bring jihadist Muslims back into the fold of human life. They will continue to harbor, in their hearts, grandiose designs for Islam and for themselves.

They will continue to believe that the earth belongs to Allah and they, therefore, are its lawful inheritors. And this belief will continue to motive them to fight and kill the infidels, until they become the usurpers of the land and the grabbers of the wealth that they believe rightfully belongs to them.

Conclusion

We have seen many things about Islam and Muhammad. We have seen that Allah had no more power than a human being in the 7th century. He made exactly the same mistakes about astronomy and evolution that human beings made back then. He showed no evidence of medical knowledge beyond that of the time. He showed no evidence of technological knowledge either, and sent Muslims into battle with invisible angels as support rather than gunpowder and firearms. In heaven, people drink fine beverages, but no one has an iPhone.

We have seen that Allah had no more power than Muhammad. Allah could not win battles if Muhammad didn't. He could not defeat great empires like Persia if Muhammad didn't. He could not relieve Muhammad's pain in his final days, since Muhammad couldn't either. Allah never performed miracles before the eyes of skeptics, because Muhammad couldn't either.

We have seen that Allah greatly favored Muhammad. Allah granted him the extraordinary freedom to ignore His laws, so he could, for instance, have far more wives than any other Muslims. Allah intervened to rescue Muhammad's honor in the affair of his favorite wife Aisha, and as a result Muslim women are suffering to this day. Allah even told Muslims when to enter and leave Muhammad's home, so as not to disturb the Prophet, and took responsibility for the rudeness.

We have seen that Allah bears all the characteristics of a human invention. He is inconsistent, just like human liars. He offers rewards and punishments in a realm where no one can prove their existence. His most urgent demand is belief in Him and His Prophet, yet He has rewarded Unbelievers with the most fabulous treasures on the planet and consigned most Believers to misery.

None of it makes sense unless Allah and the Quran are the fictions of Muhammad.

As we have noted, Muhammad was an imposter and a liar. He spoke and acted in ways that suited his agenda, and the text of the Quran overflows with evidence of it. In pursuit of his coarse ambitions, he turned Allah into his personal servant. He made Him an accessory to his crimes and used Him to justify acts he himself could not. And in his unguarded moments, or when he felt like it, he acted as Allah and no one ever noticed.

As a fiction, Allah deserves no veneration. But let's assume for a moment that He does exist. If so, He has committed countless errors, crimes, and acts of wanton disregard for human welfare. He has spurred the Believers to commit horrifying acts, and yet — amazingly— He has given the Unbelievers lives of ease and pleasure. Devout Muslims must ask themselves who they are really worshipping!

Instead of bowing to the inanities of the Quran, Muslims should rely on themselves. The Quran was nothing but a device to help one man, and later his followers, accumulate power in a backward age. This book has fooled Muslims for ages. It is long past time for them to realize its true nature. Muslims should discard its "revelations," think for themselves, cooperate with the rest of the world, and work

hard to succeed and advance the common good of humanity. Otherwise, they will continue to dwell in a worldly Hell the Quran has woven for them.

John Quincy Adams summed it up over 150 years ago:

"In the seventh century of the Christian era, a wandering Arab [i.e. Muhammad] of the lineage of Hagar the Egyptian, combining the powers of transcendent genius, with the preternatural energy of a fanatic, and the fraudulent spirit of an impostor, proclaimed himself as a messenger from Heaven, and spread desolation and delusion over an extensive portion of the earth. Adopting from the sublime conception of the Mosaic Law, the doctrine of one omnipotent God; he connected indissolubly with it, the audacious falsehood, that he was himself his prophet and apostle. Adopting from the new Revelation of Jesus, the faith and hope of immortal life, and of future retribution, he humbled it to the dust by adapting all the rewards and sanctions of his religion to the gratification of the sexual passion. He poisoned the sources of human felicity at the fountain, by degrading the condition of the female sex and the allowance of polygamy; and he declared undistinguishing and exterminating war, as a part of his religion, against all the rest of mankind.

"The essence of his doctrine was violence and lust: To exalt the brutal over the spiritual part of human nature. Between these two religions, thus contrasted in their characters, a war of twelve hundred years has already raged. The war is yet flagrant. While the merciless and dissolute dogmas of the false prophet shall furnish motives to human action, there can never be peace upon earth, and goodwill towards men."

"There can never be peace on earth." Indeed. The sooner Muslims eject Muhammad from their lives, the better for them

and for generations to come. There is no second option. Letting His dictates affect their lives has proved disastrous for Muslims in the past, and it will destroy their future lives as well. Non-Muslims will also suffer immeasurably if Muslims fail to change their so-called Islamic ways of life.